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ZENAS HENR

SARA · WARE · BASSET

tion, American

By Sara Ware Bassett

THE TAMING OF ZENAS HENRY

THE WAYFARERS AT THE ANGEL'S

THE HARBOR ROAD

THE WALL BETWEEN

The TAMING OF ZENAS HENRY

BY

SARA WARE BASSETT

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN & COMPANY
1920

O, far away, green waves, your voices call;
Your cool lips kiss the wild and weedy shore;
And out upon the sea-line sails are brown—
White sea birds, crying, hover—soft shades fall—
Deep waters dimple 'round the dripping oar,
And last rays light the little fishing town.

—MARY C. GILLINGHAM.

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CHAPTER I

WILTON

ON a narrow bar of sand, surrounded by a moody ocean, lies Wilton.

Sometimes the sand is golden, the ocean blue; then Wilton is in springtime humor—every wave dances, every dune sparkles with mica, every stretch of marsh grass is emerald-hued. But under a summer sun the sea scarcely breathes; white dunes give out shimmers of heat; the marsh grass sways lazily. Fall sees Wilton often veiled in ragged mists, with muttering surf, cheerless dunes, dripping marsh grass; or, tempest-swept, its waves foam upon the shore, the dunes rise like spectres, the bronzed grass is beaten down. Winter brings leaden seas, snow-buried dunes, lifeless grasses.

But no matter what the season, Wilton is ever Wilton!

Along its main street, deep with sand, straggle

a score of weather-bleached houses about which crippled willows huddle, stretching their branches into the lee of the west. This street has its beginning in the crescent-shaped beach at the further end of the town—an untidy beginning, too, choked by a litter of lobster-pots, drying nets, and upturned dories. It is from this "Land's End" that the life-saving station sends its beacon out over the waters after dusk. The bay within the enclosure is dotted by numberless skiffs and yawls, as well as an occasional schooner which put in for shelter from a rough sea.

Away from the bay and the confusion of the beach wanders the main street. Off between silvered fish-shanties and dwellings it makes its way, winding through miles of silent wood-roads, until it reaches Wilton Junction.

Wilton Junction, the upstart child of a sleepy parent, stands proudly beside the railroad. Never did it know the isolation of being reached only by fishing-smack, as in a former day did Wilton. No, Wilton Junction daily witnesses the arrival of a solitary train which puffs with importance to the limit of narrow rust-covered rails. Wilton Junction, furthermore, boasts a modern church, three shops, a band, and—glory of glories—a

hotel. The "Junction folks" regard Wilton with scorn, declaring they would rather be buried alive than live there. Wilton dwellers, on the other hand, assert they should be "clean beat out" to reside forever in the "hustle" of the Junction. Yet the Junction, even at its maddest moments, cannot keep pace with Sawyer's Falls—the nearest city—for it is still provincial enough to class toothbrushes with its summer novelties, and to know but a single variety of breakfast food. Moreover, at train time, its stores are closed that its shopkeepers may join the rest of the populace that loiters and chats on the station platform.

But Wilton never mingles at these gatherings. A tiny settlement walled in between the ocean and miles of low, pine-covered hills, it does its visiting amid nets on the beach; from dory to dory; or upon "the Anxious Seat"—the bench upon the bluff from which women strain eyes seaward for the first glimpse of a belated mackerel fleet. Or sometimes it prefers the hour when the mail comes in to exchange gossip. For Wilton does gossip—gossips openly and unashamed. It is far too artless to conceal the interest it feels in its people.

"When folks don't tell things 'bout themselves

there's only one reason," argues Silas Nickerson, the postmaster. "It's because they're ashamed of it!"

Therefore it is tacitly understood that each individual offer as a benefaction to the town, a faithful account of any deed deviating from the daily routine.

Such deviations, alas, are few enough!

From the time the sun dimples into pink the waters of the bay, until the pines crowning the hills that flank the hamlet are tinged to copper, life drifts on in an almost unvarying rhythm. So even a relation do the round of homely tasks maintain toward the whirling of the planets, that it would be difficult to decide whether the faint smoke from the morning fires rises as incense to the coming dawn, or whether the dawn comes, obedient to the beckonings of the pale chimney spirits.

With daybreak, so long as the season holds, the fishing fleet puts off to "the Ledges" speeding into the crimson of the sunrise noiselessly, for Wilton has not yet been invaded by the gasoline engine. Most of the townsfolk are astir before the white sails are fairly out of sight. A cock crows, a windmill creaks, there is the sound of an ax, the pene-

trating call of one neighbor to another. A man with jangling milk cans passes down the road, his footfalls muffled in the sand. A group of youngsters, ever alert for the flight of darkness, scamper along the shore shouting in rivalry to the booming of the surf, and dragging after them great tangles of wet kelp.

Slowly the light topping the crest of the dunes steals down, flooding them with gold.

Then Wilton is really awake! Once more the unchanging round of life is taken up. The mother bustles after the children (youth is not plenty in this dull little village) and, coaxing them from the allurements of the beach, starts them off to school. Afterward she turns to her home duties. There is always enough to keep her busy—and her husband, too. But what a vast difference there is in the method by which these two attack their obligations! All day her wiry little body flits about, completing one task and taking up the next one with the quick dartings of a humming bird on the wing. Not so her helpmate! If he is not with the fishermen he rakes, perhaps, a part of the lawn with purposeless stroke; drops the rake to visit at the front fence with the butcher; abandons the butcher to view through his telescope some passing

five-master; leaves the five-master to feed the hens; and then deserts the still unsatisfied hens to welcome the coming of the noon mail at the store. It is from the bench outside the post office where he sits smoking in company with other recreants, that he is later summoned by his wife and led back to the unfinished lawn, and the hungry hens.

For it is woman, after all, who guides the mariner when he is in port.

Master of his ship, and often the most active of creatures when afloat, he is ill at ease on shore, speedily degenerating into a chronic idler the moment he drops anchor. Alas, he even sinks still farther and becomes the spendthrift if he but have a big haul of mackerel. All this the lean, keen-eyed partner of his home realizes but too well. Therefore, with set jaw she holds him to his work, compelling his respect thereby, although many a time rousing his temper by her relentless dictatorship. In his soul he acknowledges the justice of her insistence, even though outwardly he rebels against it. Quietly or with open aggression, according to the limitations of her tact, she is the force that rules the throne. Not only is she wife, mother, nurse, cook; she is a score of things besides.

If sudden frosts overtake the cranberries, endangering the year's crop, instantly she is on her knees in the bog with back as strong as any Portuguese laborer. She it is who borders the front walk with lime-washed pebbles; who superintends the stationing of the red, white, and blue dory filled with nasturtiums in the middle of the lawn; who directs the training of the crimson rambler over the doorway. If she does not altogether fancy the whale's vertebræ with which her spouse further embellishes the grass-plot, she yields the point in silence, recognizing that this is the universal expression of the esthetic in the male population of the town. In consequence almost every dwelling is ornamented with such portions of this monster's skeleton as its owner has been able to procure, the proudest citizen—a retired pilot—delighting in a pair of huge jaws of an awful whiteness, which stand upright and hold within their grip a swinging tub of petunias.

"Sometimes," ruminates Zenas Henry, "it makes me sorter creep to think what a school of whales would rise up an' gather their bones together if the last trump should sound through this town. It doesn't seem safe."

The wife's objection to having her front yard

transformed into a natural history museum certainly is not on the ground of its danger. She argues, however, and argues wisely, that if the lawn is to any degree tidy it is a triumph. Here her strength dissipates itself. There is no such thing as rousing a spark of pride in the appearance of the back yard. Amid chaos that would do honor to the pathway of some gigantic cyclone her husband sits on a barrel or on the chopping block, and smokes with complete serenity. She must therefore content herself by closing the blinds toward the woodshed and giving her overwrought feelings vent in making glorious her own particular province by sweeping, scrubbing, and polishing it afresh.

And yet this woman who stands upon her threshold, whiplash in hand, is far from being the tyrant she seems. She is but the mouthpiece of a never-resting conscience whose will she echoes and before whose mandates she bows, a slave. Over inclination, over pity, over affection, roughshod this power constantly drives her on, but so well does she conceal her servitude that to all about her she is ever the sovereign and proclaims her royal New England blood by governing her kingdom as unto the Lord.

And her consort?

Bronzed he is, with ruddy color burned into the cheek; eye alert for every mood of the waves; hair dank from sea-sweeping breezes; hands toughened by trawl and line; body lithe from rigid economy. A man who has seen too much of tragedy to smile easily. Dwarfing, it is true, when amid trivialities, but rising like a giant when summoned to heroic action.

And beneath this rough and often cold exterior, man and woman alike possess hearts as warm as their own sun-kissed sands; courage born of storm and tempest; that generosity that is fostered only by a common poverty; and a marvelous individuality, the outgrowth of a life so loosely woven that one is not crushed against his neighbor.

For Wilton clay has been molded in no single pattern. In common with all other human beings these fisher-folk have been stamped into peculiar design by disposition, environment, and experience; they only differ from the outside world in daring to venture forth with the stamp unconcealed upon them. Scarce one in the hamlet but can boast decided personality unless, perhaps, it be Uncle Martha, who has faded into Aunt

Martha's echo, and even he is individual through his very lack of individuality.

Yet is there one in the village who towers above them all—one whom Nature has cast from a crude but massive mold, and who stands in distinct outline against that background of sea, sand, and sunshine, one respected but feared of all Wilton—Zenas Henry, Prince of Independents!

CHAPTER II

ZENAS HENRY

ZENAS HENRY BREWSTER was famed throughout Wilton for two accomplishments—his weather predictions and his temper! The former he derived from a pile of almanacs, the latter from his paternal grandfather. Neither friend nor foe challenged Zenas Henry's supremacy in either field.

So accurate were his forecasts of cloud or sunshine that he had become the weather oracle of the town. No fisherman ventured forth without first consulting him; there was no shingling, plowing, or planting without his approval. Sea-turns and hot waves were to him what the anise bag is to the hound; and so quickly could he scent an east wind that, whenever he poked his nose outside his door, he was carefully watched. *There goes*

stood that those guilty objects had caused Zenas Henry a fall one icy night, and had therefore sacrificed their position of honor.

Within doors other chattels were serving out terms of punishment. A large plaster cast of Clytie, which had given Zenas Henry a fright one moonlight evening, was shrouded in sable draperies and turned face to the wall. The mantel clock, with its full-rigged ship pitching amid cerulean billows, had once offered false information; so its untrustworthy hands had been removed and it was henceforth sentenced to the ignominy of an aimless ticking. Near the clock lay a lenseless pair of spectacles. Zenas Henry could have told you how those malefactors had maintained invidious silence upon his forehead while he searched two hours for them.

"If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out!" quoted Zenas Henry.

So, with uncompromising literalness, he had proceeded at once to do so. Fortunately for Wilton, most of Zenas Henry's rage was vented upon inanimate objects. When he was thoroughly incensed toward persons he clamped his jaws together, turned on his heel, and strode unseeingly into the depths of the pine woods. What hap-

pened there no one ever knew. When he emerged he was always pale but entirely subdued.

On this particular April day, however, both the world and Zenas Henry were in holiday humor. The ocean, to its boundary of clear sky, was an iridescent disk of blue and gold. Floods of warmth poured down upon the red and the silvered roofs of the houses beneath the hill. But behind the pine-covered slopes to the west of the village, masses of white clouds, with cavernous shadows in their midst, rolled up into the heaven. As they spread rapidly seaward their jagged edges shifted into a series of snowy gargoyles that grinned out into the sunshine. Zenas Henry studied these clouds thoughtfully. Then he drew in his nostrils. He could smell the salt of the ocean; the steaming loam of his newly plowed field; the bonfire, sleepily devouring a stack of whitened cornstalks. But evidently he scented something else in the air for, when he set out for the post office, he wore his umbrella in his usual dangling fashion.

Yet the prospect of a storm did not dampen his spirits, for he hummed to himself as he went along, and he smiled, too, as if some unusually pleasant reverie absorbed him. The noon mail

had just come in, and Zenas Henry always went *to* the noon mail. He never went *for* the noon mail because he never had any.

When he entered the post office, Silas Nickerson, the snuff-colored postmaster, peered from behind the barred window like a ferret from its cage.

"Mail come in, Silas?" asked Zenas Henry.

Zenas Henry always opened his conversation with this question, although he was perfectly aware that the mail came on the "vestibule train" which was due to arrive at Wilton Junction at precisely twenty-seven minutes past eleven. He could see the black smoke of the engine from his own windows, and could calculate to a second how long it would be before Ephram Wise, the mail carrier, would drive up to the office with his salt and pepper mare and toss the leather bag in at the door. He had, moreover, successfully reckoned by intricate methods just how long it would take Silas to stamp the mail, read the postal cards, sort the letters and papers, and distribute all in the boxes. Yet Zenas Henry had invariably greeted Silas with the same remark for the last twenty years, and Silas, who was one of Zenas Henry's best friends, comprehended perfectly that

this was a mere salutation, and therefore always responded:

"Yes, just in," with the same inflection he had used for that same long stretch of time.

"Heavy mail, Silas?"

"Tol'able."

Pound! pound! went the letter stamp.

"Go to town meetin' last night, Silas?"

"Yep."

"Rheumatism kep' me home. What'd they do?"

"Considered agin what they reconsidered last time—nothin' new."

Zenas Henry shifted nervously from one foot to the other. These were not really the things he had come to say. He glanced cautiously about. There was no one in the post office, but as he well knew that it would be crowded in a moment, he dared not delay.

"I'm kinder thinkin', Silas, of gettin' married," he blurted out.

"Of gettin' *what?*" shouted Silas.

The pounding ceased.

There was an awful stillness in the room.

"Of—of—gettin'—married," quavered Zenas Henry. "You see," he went on hurriedly, "I'm

plagued to death with the cookin', dish-washin', an' mixin' up meal for the hens. Since I got rheumatism I'm 'bout ready to chuck the whole thing! Seems to me if I got somebody—say Abbie Howland—I'd be a sight better off. Abbie's a capital cook, an' our wood lots join. Besides that, she's quiet, an' wouldn't go settin' up against me. I like my way, an' I reckon she'd let me have it."

"Well, I swan to man!" ejaculated Silas.

"Don't act so dumfounded," Zenas Henry said sharply. "I dunno why I ain't got as much right to marry as other folks. You did."

"Yes," returned Silas feebly, "I—did."

He paused between the words as if turning over in his mind for the first time the exact combination of circumstances that had led him to take the step.

"Well," broke in Zenas Henry, "why shouldn't *I*?"

"Now don't go gettin' uppish 'bout it, Zenas Henry," put in Silas soothingly. "I ain't sayin' you should, an' I ain't sayin' you shouldn't. You've got the same right as every other man to run your head into a noose, an' mebbe when the string's pulled up you'll like it. Abbie's a good soul, an' mor'n that, she's mild. Judgin' from

what I've seen of her, I guess you'd be the boss all right. If you care anythin' 'bout her, why I say—go ahead!"

"Carin' 'bout her is just the sticker," Zenas Henry admitted slowly. "I dunno whether I do or not. Of course I've known her for years, but it ain't really much but a skin-deep sort of thing."

While he reflected there was a stir in the office.

Lyman Bearse, the carpenter, shuffled in and dropped down on an egg-case near the door.

"Mornin', Zenas Henry."

"Mornin', Lyman."

"So we're goin' to have showers!"

Lyman eyed the umbrella with evident disappointment.

"Before night."

"Means I better git the new house roofed over quick's I can," said the carpenter, rising.

"I reckon. Hit us about three, I figger."

Then Zenas Henry turned to Silas:

"Guess I'll step up to Abbie Howland's."

"All right. If you're goin', take along her *Trumpeter;* an' there's a postal, too, for her somewheres—*Will come Thursday. M. H.* Now where'd I put that thing? Oh, here 'tis! I can't for the life of me think who *M. H.* is."

"Well now, weren't you good to bring my paper and the postal!" she exclaimed, as rubbing the flour from her hands she took up the card. "It's from Mary, Dave's bride. Dave's got married. I guess you didn't know that—most folks didn't. Yes, he's married! He slipped up to Brockton and married a girl there without anybody knowin' it. They're coming home here Thursday, an' it makes me feel queer 'nough, I can tell you. She's a nice woman, but, you see, I've been running this house for Dave for eighteen years, an' it ain't so easy to step aside now an' watch somebody else do it."

Her voice faltered.

She stopped and swept a knife round the edge of the pie plate, trimming off fragments of snowy crust.

"Then why don't you up an' marry me, Abbie?" burst out Zenas Henry.

For Abbie, unfortunately, the situation was not the outgrowth of days of previous meditation. Zenas Henry's suggestion had never before entered her mind. It seemed a jest that did not merit seriousness. She cocked her head to one side, eying critically the pie she held in her hand.

"Very kind of you, Zenas Henry, but I guess not," she answered, smiling.

But Zenas Henry was in deadly earnest.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Why not? Why not?" Abbie paused.

Then she lifted her eyes roguishly to Zenas Henry's and advanced the first reason that popped into her head:

"Well, if you must have a reason," she said, "I never could marry a man who wore that hat."

Pointing to the tall white beaver on the floor beside Zenas Henry's chair, she laughed.

But Zenas Henry did not laugh.

Livid with rage he rose, seized hat and umbrella, and disappeared before the astonished woman could speak. Up the street he went, muttering as he strode along. Then he plunged into the pine woods, where he sat rigidly down upon a stump and took off his hat.

"So this is the trick you play me!" he remarked severely. "Here I've stuck to you for years an' now you get me into a mess like this. But I'll be even with you. Mebbe you were my father's weddin' hat, but you won't be mine!"

Opening the sharpest blade of his knife he set to work. Rain began to fall in heavy, formless

splashes, but, unheeding it, Zenas Henry went on, shredding his hat ruthlessly to pieces. It was dark when he finished his task. He viewed the mosaic at his feet with satisfaction. Then, hatless, he opened his umbrella and moved home through the mists.

The next morning, almost before dawn, he was astir. He got his breakfast, washed the dishes, fed the hens, harnessed the sorrel horse into his wagon, and before the village was fairly awake, set forth on a twelve-mile drive to Sawyer's Falls. Yet he was not so early that his wagon wheels were unheard. Through many a closed shutter spectators commented excitedly upon his departure. It was not so much that he was going to the city and no one could tell *why*, as that—instead of his white beaver hat—he wore a faded woolen cap! What could be the meaning of it?

Zenas Henry himself was too much engrossed with his own thoughts to sense the consternation he was leaving behind him. He drove directly to Sawyer's Falls and returned by a back way, carrying two large bundles in the rear of his wagon. It was not only shorter but cooler to come home by the sandy wood roads and ford the shallow river at the foot of his own pasture. He had

often done it before. But to-day, no sooner did he find himself midway in the stream than his wagon wheels settled firmly in the mud and refused to turn. In vain did Zenas Henry chirp, coax, curse, and beat the horse—the obstinate vehicle stood its ground.

"So you won't? You don't see fit to go home, eh? This is your last chance. It's now or never! Heave to, an' haul again, Samuel! You won't stir? Well then, here you sit!"

He clambered out of the wagon and jumped into the water, which was waist-deep. First he unharnessed Samuel; then, taking the bundles from under the seat, horse and man splashed to the shore. Here Zenas Henry stood for a moment to recover his breath; then he addressed the wagon:

"There you'll sit till you drop to pieces. I've given you plenty of chance to come along with Samuel an' me, but you wouldn't. Guess I can do without a wagon, right 'nough."

Across the pasture went Zenas Henry, the patient horse plodding at his heels. After Samuel had been rubbed down and fed Zenas Henry disappeared with nervous haste into the house.

Three o'clock was sounding from the spire of

the small white church when he again came forth. What wonder that he cast anxious glances about, as if fearing to venture through the center of the town? Such a miracle had been worked in his appearance that Zenas Henry scarcely knew himself. He was dressed in a frock coat, few of which had ever before been seen in Wilton. Moreover, on his head glistened a high black hat. He stood for an instant like a shrinking bather surveying an icy pool, then, setting his jaw, he plunged into the street and made a dash for the Howland farm.

He found Abbie smoothing out a table cloth.

She looked up, then set the hot flat-iron down on its metal stand with a crash.

"My land, Zenas Henry!" she exclaimed, in an awed whisper.

"I didn't mean to give you a turn," said Zenas Henry in an embarrassed flurry. "I just came to say that the beaver hat's gone, so I'm ready now to get married whenever you are."

Abbie was almost too astonished to speak.

"You don't mean to say," she stammered incredulously, "that—that you really want me to marry you—that you thought I meant what I said about your white hat?"

Zenas Henry nodded.

"Why, bless your heart, I thought you were joking! I've no more idea of marrying you than I have of marrying my great-grandfather. 'Twouldn't make a mite of difference what you had on. Your temper's something awful! Fancy marrying a man who took his spite out on every weather-vane, doorstep, an' marble figger! I'd be scared to death. You wouldn't ketch me doing it —not if I knew it first."

Zenas Henry clenched his fists, but did not reply.

"A pretty kind of husband you'd make," continued Abbie, becoming interested in her subject. "Like's not you'd undertake to discipline *me*, too, along with your clock an' your spectacles!"

The woman's daring seemed to hypnotize Zenas Henry into silence. In all his life no one had ever presumed to say such things to him before. Even while it angered him, it stirred his admiration. He was astonished to hear himself involuntarily respond:

"No, I wouldn't."

"Well, I wouldn't risk it until I'd had some proof of it."

busy smearing with frosting the russet dome of a sponge-cake. Zenas Henry began without introduction:

"The front steps are back; the weather-vane's on the barn—it's squeakin' like the deuce, too, but it's on there; the plaster woman's facin' straight ahead; hands are on the clock; glasses got eyes in 'em; wagon's hauled into the barn. I've forgiven 'em all! Now will you marry me?"

This time Abbie did not laugh.

Perhaps she felt a justifiable pride that she had power to make Zenas Henry do for her things which neither the prayers nor the ridicule of others could accomplish. Perhaps, also, life at the Howland home had not been altogether easy since Dave's marriage. She hesitated, and that moment of helplessness was fatal. Zenas Henry rose like the victor of some beleaguered city.

"You're goin' to marry me right away," he declared with a positiveness so assured that it swept Abbie along with it. "You're comin' to the hill farm to live, where nobody's goin' to bother you, an' where you can have what you want when you want it. Reckon we'll get on right 'nough. I own to havin' a temper—you told the truth there. I do get all ruffled up, like a fightin' cock.

But don't you sorter think it's your Christian duty to come an' help smooth down my feathers? I'll set out to do what I can toward keepin' 'em down, if you will. Ain't it your plain duty, now?"

Abbie smiled at the braided rug beneath her feet.

"You've done more'n anybody else ever did, already," continued Zenas Henry in pleading tones, "an' there's no knowin' how much more you might do. I'll try to please you, an' mebbe I won't turn out bad's you think. Now ain't you just bound to come?"

"Maybe I am," murmured Abbie faintly.

"Well, *will* you?" persisted Zenas Henry.

"Yes, I'll come. Only you've got to understand that I've got a temper, too."

"Land alive! I've found that out! But yours ain't a patch on mine. It'll make me a sight more comfortable, I can tell you, to know that sometimes you'll get mad yourself. You'll understand better how I feel. 'Twould be awful mortifyin' to have an angel always sittin' round, disapprovin'!"

Abbie laughed shyly and Zenas Henry put out his brown palm.

"Before we shake on it, though, there's some-

considered itself cheated. Long ago it had been decreed that Zenas Henry should devote his life to his almanacs and his temper; and that Abbie should make a home for some one of the captains who, as Captain Phineas Taylor observed, *had been washed ashore.*

Now it was not true that after a wreck Wilton beach was strewn with captains of different varieties, and a woman had but to wade into the surf, drag ashore the sort best pleasing her, resuscitate, and marry him; yet it was nevertheless a fact that many a vessel had been stranded on the sandbars outside the bay and more than one captain had been brought to land by the life-savers, had been nursed back to health, and had subsequently married and settled in the town which had befriended him. Captain Phineas Taylor himself had, in fact, found his way into Wilton in a breeches-buoy; so had Captain Jonas Baker and Captain Benjamin Todd.

These three were Zenas Henry's particular cronies. All were past middle life and, whether from choice or from mischance, were still unmarried. They themselves declared emphatically that their solitary state was from preference. At the head of an inlet which wound sinuously through

the marsh grass they had appropriated a fish shanty, run a stove-pipe through the roof, and there led a care-free existence. Three hammocks swung in a row across the tiny room; their food they fished from out the deep. Occasionally, to be sure, the fire smoked, or a northeast gale threatened to tear the roof from their shelter, but, as Captain Phineas Taylor cheerily explained: "No chowder is all broth!" For a large part of every day they had been accustomed to adjourn to the rear of Silas Nickerson's store, where they were joined by Zenas Henry and by Silas himself, when he was not too busy; and here the five smoked, gossiped, and idled away the time. Therefore it was but natural that the group should have decided opinions regarding Zenas Henry's marriage.

"He'll never dock here again," lamented Captain Phineas Taylor, as they sat in one of their regular sessions at the store. "We may's well jot that down in the log. He's gone—Zenas Henry's gone—he's swallered up! Every day I've been past his house to sorter take soundin's an' give him a hail, an' there he is choppin' kindlin's, sawin' wood, doin' chores—a-workin' as he ain't worked for years. There'll be no more settin' round for him! Folks say Abbie is a great housekeeper—

always washin' her dishes in three waters, which'll be somethin' new for Zenas Henry. The women in town think she's awful smart. Lord! I hope I won't marry a smart woman!"

"You won't, Phineas—don't you fret—you won't!" declared Captain Benjamin Todd, consolingly.

Captain Jonas Baker chuckled, then took up the plaint:

"Oh, she's smart 'nough. Ain't she known fur's Sawyer's Falls as a *putter-through?* They say she never sets out to do a thing that she don't do it, an' get it done ahead of time, too. Why, she was so forehanded that her brother Dave most died livin' with her."

A significant sigh ascended from the group.

"Now we all know," continued Captain Jonas, "that Zenas Henry, like the rest of us, has got out of the habit of livin' ship-shape. If he sets sail some mornin' an' then thinks he'll haul to an' drop anchor till to-morrow, there ain't ever been anyone to care when he h'isted his canvas an' shoved off again. But it's goin' to be different now, I just tell you! He'll have to batten down his hatches, an' take his sailin' orders; an' he'll be lucky if they ain't sealed orders, too."

"I warned him against settin' out on this cruise," put in Silas Nickerson, "but what I said had 'bout as much effect as the surf breakin' over Martin's Shoals. He was bound to marry—an' he's married!"

Captain Benjamin Todd added his wail:

"Guess it'll be one spell before we ever set round an' smoke in Zenas Henry's back room again, as we did last summer. Breeziest place in the world, good as any hurricane deck!"

Zenas Henry, in the meantime, was in a state of such contentment that he would have been dumfounded had a word of his friends' commiseration reached him.

When he saw the tubs of fuchsias, the blue rocking-chair, the braided rugs—to say nothing of Abbie herself—ensconced for eternity in his kitchen, his satisfaction was supreme. Constantly he would pause in the middle of the floor, forgetting to do anything but beam about him; or, if he went outside, it was only to poke his head in at the door every other second to view with approval Abbie, who, elbow-deep in suds, stood before the sink.

How many years it was since a woman had stood there!

With her presence there stole back to Zenas Henry echoes of his old-time gentleness. Shyly, awkwardly, he found himself proffering once more the little courtesies, rusty from long disuse, which he had been wont to offer the only woman he had known—his mother.

To Abbie these acts appealed strangely.

Zenas Henry with his volcanic temper had had a peculiar charm for her ever since she had made the discovery that she had power to sway those eruptions. Afterward, through their brief courtship, she had detected, beneath the gruff exterior, qualities of finer strain—kindness, generosity, reverence. Therefore, although to her neighbors the madness of this marriage was equaled only by those consenting to dwell forever on the slopes of Vesuvius, Abbie recognized the warmth of the soil beneath, and, like the peasants of Herculaneum, was willing to risk the torrents of fire.

It was as if this brusque man, swept onward by his chaotic nature, was, after all, but a child who had not yet found himself. So strong was Abbie's maternal instinct that she longed to take up the task left unfinished by his mother—the task with which the boy had been left to battle alone, and at which he had made such poor headway. Had

Zenas Henry been more introspective he might have comprehended that this temper of his was a heritage, a fault for which he was not wholly responsible; then perhaps, taking courage, he might have met it more philosophically and emerged from the battle the master rather than the slave. But life was filled with enigmas that he never thought of attempting to solve. Subtleties were not for Zenas Henry! He summed up his character in a single attribute, one which stood out so clearly that he could not fail to recognize it—his temper. So humbled was he by the knowledge of this demon's power over him that he was both surprised and touched by Abbie's sympathy.

No one but his mother had ever tried before to understand him.

As for Abbie, since she had decided to consider Zenas Henry's outbursts the moods of a child rather than those of a man, she approached the problem with confidence. Like every other unmarried woman she had her theories regarding the training of children and these she was resolved to apply to Zenas Henry. They crystallized in a determination to help her husband to help himself. Firmly she shouldered the new task, and as her faith for success made itself felt,

Then she would smile, and of course Zenas Henry wanted to.

But the rug beaten, it was only to hear:

"Now if you would really like to help me, you may bring a pail of hot water up into the garret."

Once more Zenas Henry would spring to his feet and by and by he remained there—it was the easiest way.

He would not have gone back to the idle days of his cheerless hearth, not for worlds! But when his rheumatic joints collapsed into a chair at night he reflected with wonder upon the feats he had been cajoled into performing.

No sooner, however, were the entire premises in perfect order than Abbie advanced to the second part of her program—the task of keeping them so. This she had always found simple enough. All her life she had moved in ruts until putting in place what she took out had become merely a reflex action. She had even trained Dave to refold the *Trumpeter* in its original creases; to move his chair back against the third stripe in the wall-paper; and to put his burned matches into the blue china elephant standing on the mantelpiece. She would now form in Zenas Henry similar habits. He might not enjoy the process, to be sure, but

as it would surely bring about his ultimate welfare, what he enjoyed was a matter of small consequence.

Now to fix habits in Zenas Henry was to hold in place the waves of the sea! Dave could be forced over and over into a groove until molded to a desired pattern; but Zenas Henry ran in and out of a score of grooves taking form from none. Unhampered by methods of any kind, he not only established no habits but he wore not even the shallow suggestion of one. The sheets of the *Trumpeter* he scattered broadcast as fast as he read them; he could not be made to push his chair back against the third stripe in the wall-paper; and as for the china frog on the table—it might have split its jaws asunder before it would ever have occurred to him to thrust a burned match into the mouth that yawned so invitingly.

With consternation Abbie viewed his lawlessness. In the great things she had risen nobly to her wifehood, but in the small things she was still a spinster. If left entirely to herself she would have delighted to clean the house; wash and mend her clothing; and then in the happy consciousness that everything was in perfect order, sit on the step outside, content in knowing that nothing was

getting mussed up. When she married, however, she had tried to prepare herself to face petty annoyances by reasoning:

"Men ain't orderly, like women. Zenas Henry, likely, will never take off his boots an' toe 'em out under a chair with the heels together, same's I do. I mustn't expect it."

Nevertheless, although she did not expect it, she never ceased to desire the miracle.

But Abbie was a wise woman.

She had not lived with Dave for twenty years without learning better than to nag. Resolved to trust in silence to the force of example, she patiently followed her husband about, picking up what he threw down, and straightening what he made crooked. She was unfailingly good-tempered. She cooked for him, mended his clothes; neglected nothing that would make him comfortable. Zenas Henry could not ask more. He had not expected so much. Steadily he became more and more dependent upon this tiny woman who nodded at him from across the table. He liked the little wisps of soft hair curling round her face, the eyes so broad awake, the mischievous smile, the voice with its ring of decision.

But if she would only sit down sometimes!

"I declare, she seems wound up!" he exclaimed to himself. "I wonder if she is always goin' to be followin' me round, dustin' out every chair quick's I get done sittin' in it, an' straightenin' every picture I happen to look at. It makes me nervous to have her dodgin' after me! I wish she'd haul to for just one day an' give me a chance to do as I please."

No sooner had he whispered the wish than he was ashamed of it. But human nature is human nature after all.

Strangely enough the boon he craved was borne to him on the very breath of his words.

"Zenas Henry," asked Abbie the next morning, "should you mind very much if I went this noon to take dinner with Dave an' his wife? They have been wanting us to come an' spend the day ever since we were married. If it wasn't for leaving the fires in the stoves we could both go. If I got your dinner ready to-day an' left you to eat it by yourself, would you care? I'd like to stay to supper too, an' make a real visit, long's I'm going."

Zenas Henry swelled with magnanimity.

"Of course you can go!" he responded heartily. "I don't want you to always stick at home to take

care of me. I've looked after myself for twenty years an' I reckon I can do it one more day. Go right along. I'll look after the stoves."

Abbie smiled up at him gratefully; then back she whisked to her morning's work. She made pies, cookies, and doughnuts enough to last Zenas Henry should she decide never to come back at all; afterward she swept and dusted the rooms and gave her husband his final instructions:

"Now keep it warm, Zenas Henry—don't let the plants freeze. There's chowder all ready to heat up in this bowl. Here's apple pie an' mince turnovers; here's doughnuts, here's molasses cookies, here's beach-plum preserve. Your tea is all ready in the teapot—you'll just have to pour in the boiling water. An' remember to feed the cat; you can give her some fish from the chowder."

Then down the walk through the crisp snow crunched Abbie's feet!

From the back stoop Zenas Henry watched her out of sight. Then he came in, closing the outside door with a triumphant bang. At last he was alone! There were no chores to do—he had already done them. The whole day lay before him a trackless waste, through which he might blaze any trail he pleased. What luxury! Drawing a

long breath he sat down in front of the fire, stretched his arms, and yawned. For a long time he sat there; then he began to look about.

What should he do with these precious hours of his bachelorhood?

There was no wood to chop.

It was too early for a nap.

But for replenishing the stoves he might go to the store where his cronies were.

What used he to do those lonely days when he lived alone?

Sometimes he tidied up the house. The house was now immaculate, he remembered, and needed not his touch.

Often he cooked. Alas, more food already surrounded him than it seemed he could devour in a month.

He had read his paper. Once again the indefatigable Abbie had forestalled him, having read every word of it aloud the night before.

His clothes needed no mending—they were in perfect repair.

Zenas Henry was aghast to find every escape from ennui cut off.

How lonely the house seemed! The stillness,

movin' off on the home tack—we warn't quite sure; so I came on ahead to make certain you were alone. The others are behind the woodshed. I'll signal 'em."

Going to the corner of the house, Captain Phineas twice waved his bandana.

There was more crushing of snow; then Captain Benjamin Todd and Captain Jonas Baker came into view.

"Here we are! Here we are!" puffed Captain Benjamin, "an' mighty glad we are to see you, too, Zenas Henry! We've been waitin' weeks for this chance."

Captain Jonas Baker meanwhile was clapping Zenas Henry on the shoulder and shouting above the howling of the wind:

"How goes it, lad? What's the good word? Are you all alone?"

Zenas Henry did not know what to do. Certainly they could not all stand there in the cold; and yet he sighed for Abbie's orderly sitting-room! But of course he must not let his friends suspect that.

"Come in, come in!" he replied. "Yes, I'm my own housekeeper to-day." He spoke jauntily to make a show of being quite at his ease.

The Three Captains, who evidently had not dreamed of *not* coming in, noisily preceded him within doors.

"My, but this does look snug!" cried Captain Phineas Taylor, making a tour of inspection round the sitting-room, and leaving behind him a wake of snow and mud. "Cosy as a ship's cabin, ain't it!"

"Yes, yes! It's cosy as can be!"

Nervously Zenas Henry beckoned Captain Benjamin Todd away from Abbie's geraniums.

In the meantime Captain Jonas Baker was exploring the pantry, a thing he always did whenever he came, and which he now saw no reason for not doing.

"My soul alive!" he called. "She gives you plenty to eat—thank goodness for that, Zenas Henry! Here's apple pie an' turnovers, too—mince turnovers! Here's cookies an' doughnuts enough to sink a ship! An' I do declare if here ain't a big dish of beach-plum sauce. Stuffin' you up in great shape, ain't she! I hope it's good as it looks."

Crimson with distress, Zenas Henry edged Captain Jonas out of the pantry.

"Oh, it's prime, I can tell you! My w-i-f-e,"

he stumbled consciously at the word, "is a great cook."

With the keenest interest the three visitors continued to poke about, tracking sand and snow in every direction. Finally Captain Phineas Taylor, who had finished his wanderings round the premises, came back, and taking Zenas Henry by the shoulders began solemnly:

"Now, Zenas Henry, as man to man, are you happy? Does she give you your own way; or are you sorry already, an' wishin' you could cut an' run? We all set a heap by you, an' if you find you ain't pulled in the catch you were figgerin' on, why we just want you to know that the shanty is big enough for four, an' we're ready to swing another hammock there for you any time you say the word. We've no notion to stand by an' watch any livin' woman keep you scrubbin' the decks unless you want to scrub 'em."

Zenas Henry saw that the psychological moment had arrived. If he was ever to vindicate Abbie and justify himself it must be now.

"I know you mean well an' I'm obliged to you all," he began, "but you are sightin' in a fog. Why, look round! Did you ever see a nicer place to spend an evening in than this sittin'-room?

Remember how it used to look? An' the kitchen? Just cast your eye over that tub of fuchsias! An' the food I get——!"

Eagerly his gaze traveled from one captain to another but the gleam of belief he had expected to kindle in their faces was lacking. They listened with the stoic tolerance of a trio of sphinxes. It would never do! they must be convinced—convinced at any cost.

"You'd just oughter taste Abbie's cookin'," he proceeded recklessly. "Now you all sit right down an' stay to dinner. She'll be tickled to death to have you. She's been hopin' you'd come up an' see me."

Fascinated, exhilarated by the tale he was weaving, Zenas Henry went on:

"Why, it was only yesterday she was sayin': *Zenas Henry*, says she, *the Three Captains ain't been to see you, have they? Get 'em to come up to dinner some time*, says she. An' now here you are—what could be better! I only wish she was at home so'st she could see you herself."

He was not nervous now. He was far too excited.

He unwound the mufflers from the necks of the three Captains; pulled them out of their sou'-

westers; forced them into chairs; passed the tobacco; put the chowder on to heat.

The chowder hot, Zenas Henry set the table.

He brought out the pies, all of them; the cookies, the doughnuts, the turnovers, the beach-plum preserve. He even rooted under overturned bowls until he dragged sacred fruit-cake from its hiding. Now that he was aimed for destruction what matter how rapidly he sped? When all was ready he summoned his guests who descended upon the meal with the zest of men who had been fed for months on hardtack and dried fish. They ate and ate! One by one Abbie's carefully cooked dainties—a supply that would have lasted her and Zenas Henry for weeks—disappeared, until scarce a crumb could be found upon the dilapidated board.

"I never ate so much at a single sittin' in all my born days!" gasped Captain Phineas Taylor. "Do you mean to say you live like this all the time, Zenas Henry?"

"All the time!" repeated Zenas Henry calmly.

Captain Jonas Baker who had been eating in meditative silence now spoke:

"Well, Zenas Henry, all I can say is there was some excuse for your gettin' married. We ain't

ever goin' to worry 'bout you again. If you eat like this every day no wonder you want to do a few chores round the place to keep your digestion movin'."

Captain Benjamin yawned voluptuously as he stretched his arms out of his faded blue coat.

"Lord! think of havin' this for a steady thing!" he murmured.

In the contented silence that followed the Three Captains and Zenas Henry refilled their pipes and puffed lazily.

But when, at last, Zenas Henry rose and began to scrape the plates, his visitors shot to their feet and in unison wriggled into their coats. They had no notion of washing up those pyramids of dishes—not they! With boisterous farewells and shouts of pleasure they filed down over the dry snow, and Zenas Henry stood alone before the wreckage upon the table.

He did not want for an occupation now!

He washed and wiped, washed and wiped with feverish haste; but almost every dish in the pantry had been pressed into service and work as he would he made little headway. There were dozens of them—hundreds! If he could only get them out of the way before his wife returned!

He was still deep in hot suds when the door opened softly and he saw Abbie standing on the sill.

"I didn't stay to supper after all," she said, intent on stamping the snow from her shoes.

Then she looked up.

"Why, Zenas Henry, what *are* you doing?"

Zenas Henry steadied himself against the dish-pan while through the thick mists of tobacco smoke Abbie surveyed the muddy floor, the fragments of food, the heaps of dishes towering in the haze like the cliffs of England in a Channel fog. To her husband it seemed as if she would never speak again. To behold the house, the pride of her wifely care, looking as if the seas had broken over it roused the temper which seldom flamed forth, it is true, but which scorched when it did like the vermilion glow from a smelting furnace. And as fuel to the blaze was the thought that in her absence Zenas Henry should have planned a scheme so deliberate. Yet before her wrath broke forth she tried to check it. After all, whose house was it? And why had she married if only to cripple her husband's freedom? She had honestly wished to make him happy. Why not prove it now?

The warfare with her temper was actually waged in a few seconds but it seemed hours to her—days to the man who stood viewing the conflict. Ordinarily he knew little enough of what went on *inside folks*, but his own turmoils of the flesh led him to recognize the battle that now raged within his wife's soul. When at last her voice broke the stillness its tone was not at all what he expected to hear. He had never known it to be so gentle, nor had it ever before rung with that peculiarly sympathetic note.

"Well, well! So you have been having company, haven't you, Zenas Henry? I am real glad. It's forlorn being alone all day. Now let me get my things off an' in a jiffy I'll help you wash up those dishes."

"It was the Three Captains—I didn't ask 'em," was all Zenas Henry managed to stammer.

Firmly Abbie gripped her tongue lest the observation that the Three Captains were the most worthless creatures in Wilton escape her.

"Well, it was nice they came, anyway. Lucky I had something cooked up for 'em to eat."

"They've eaten it!" was the despairing confession.

"No matter. What's food for?"

Hurrying out of her wraps Abbie pinned on her bibbed apron.

As for Zenas Henry he could have kissed the hem of her sprigged calico dress. Would he ever rise from a combat such a victor?

Modestly his wife ignored her triumph. She related her day's adventures, making them as amusing as possible, and while she chattered she washed up the muddy floor and cooked more food for supper. Perhaps she felt that she had received her laurel wreath. Certainly there was something in Zenas Henry's eyes that was worth it all—something she had never seen there before and which sent the blood tingling to her cheek.

She would have been surprised indeed had she dreamed that at that very moment three other men besides Zenas Henry were thinking of her—the Three Captains, who amid the roar of breakers and the clatter of hail on the roof of their hut, sat in a silence unwontedly grim. The confused remains of supper stood on the top of a barrel and still sent steaming odors of onions and coffee into the room. Outside the wind howled round the dunes, dashing swirls of sand against the windows, and wrenching every timber of the house. Whenever there was a lull in the uproar the riot of

surf sounded with terrible distinctness, pounding up on the beach as if it hungered to crush the shanty and sweep it away in its churning turmoil. Between the loose shingles of the shelter, frosty breaths found their way and chilled the three men who, bundled in great coats, smoked so thoughtfully.

It was Captain Jonas Baker who spoke at last, his words the outcome of long meditation:

"Do you know," he announced impressively, "I'd jump mast-high for a wife like Zenas Henry's!"

"So would I!" Captain Benjamin Todd agreed with fervor.

"It'll do you no good to take a leap like that," drawled Captain Phineas Taylor. "The Lord only made one woman off that pattern, an' Zenas Henry had the sense to make fast to her."

CHAPTER IV

CAPTAIN BENJAMIN TODD IS KIDNAPPED

ALAS for the snares into which deceit leads the unwary!

Zenas Henry's roseate description of his wife's virtues was the foundation of a train of most unexpected events.

One sharp December morning when every pine was ice-laden, the ground a flashing field of whiteness, the ocean blue as a Mediterranean bay, Zenas Henry drove to the Junction for grain. Abbie, who was alone rolling out the lattice top for a cranberry pie, heard the discordant creaking of his wheels as he sped out of sight. The kitchen was very still, but from the eaves of the cottage the water dripped with clock-like beats into a small pool of ice just beneath the window, and every now and then snow grated heavily across the

shingled roof and slipped from the ridge-pole into the sweep of glistening meadow that sparkled all around.

Suddenly there was a knock at the woodshed door, and when Abbie turned the big wooden button there stood Captain Phineas Taylor smiling into her face, and dangling a lobster in one hand and a large cod in the other.

"Good mornin', Mis' Brewster! Good mornin', marm!" The Captain bowed gallantly. "I came in behalf of my friends down to the shanty. We sampled your food the other day, an' now we want you should sample ours."

Captain Phineas continued to duck his head, much embarrassed at actually being brought face to face with a woman—and such a woman! He smiled, too, a smile of such disarming good-will that his weather-beaten face cracked into a network of wrinkles that disclosed deep white furrows unscathed by tan, and resulted in an effect strikingly grotesque.

Abbie returned the smile—what woman would not? It was an irresistible smile including the whole earth in its geniality.

"Now that's real kind of you!" she exclaimed

heartily. "Zenas Henry an' I haven't had a lobster this season. Won't you come in?"

She ventured the invitation politely, but at the same time she held out her hand for the fish.

Instead of refusing, as he was expected to do, the Captain electrified her by replying:

"Why, thank you, marm, I believe I will come in."

Abbie was disconcerted. It always annoyed her to be talked to when she was baking; besides, the Captain's boots were very wet. However, no choice remained but to lead the way into the kitchen.

"You'll find me finishing up some pies," she explained. "Perhaps you won't mind if I go on an' get 'em into the oven."

"Not a mite! Not a mite! Go right on with your work. If these pies are goin' to be as good as the ones we had here the other day I wouldn't stop your makin' 'em for anything in the world."

Captain Phineas settled into the blue rocker with evident pleasure, friendliness beaming from every crease in his round, red face.

Abbie was too true a housewife for the compliment to fail of its effect.

"I'm glad you liked my cooking," she called

over her shoulder as she went to put the fish into the back room.

"Like it! I should say we did! I reckon you didn't spy much ballast floatin' round afterward, did you?"

He broke into a hearty laugh.

"You should just have seen Zenas Henry heap up our plates, Mis' Brewster!" went on the Captain. "He acted as if he thought we were half starved; an' mebbe he warn't so fur wrong, either. An' warn't he proud to show off all the things you could make!"

This new aspect of the affair arrested Abbie's attention.

"You see"—Captain Phineas leaned forward confidentially—"I guess I may's well tell you the whole joke—you see, since Zenas Henry got married we've spotted him workin' round the place harder'n ever he used to work, an' we kinder got the notion you made him walk the plank. Funny, warn't it! Course we were wrong—we know that now, but we didn't then; so we came slidin' up here the first minute you steamed out of sight to ask Zenas Henry whether he'd netted a good catch, or only caught a sculpin."

Again Captain Phineas chuckled at the absurd-

ity of the question and waited an echoing chuckle from Abbie. The chuckle came, but it was a faint one.

"Now when Zenas Henry asked us to stay to dinner, an' began haulin' all that food out of the cuddy, we knew we'd missed our soundin's. He went on to tell us how he had fished up a pearl in his oyster, explainin' how you liked to have his friends here; how you fed him up; how free an' easy you kept things round here; an' how he only worked 'cause he wanted exercisin'. Well, you've no idea what a weight it took off us! We're kind of a lazy lot ourselves—not havin' any folks to care 'bout you makes you slump down like a plummet; we haven't lost all our feelin's though, an' we do set a heap by Zenas Henry. So it was good news, I can tell you, to hear he was happy, glad as we'd been to have him come an' stay at the shanty with us!"

"Stay at the shanty!" repeated Abbie vaguely.

"Yes. That's the best part of the joke!" Captain Phineas laughed until the tears in his blue eyes forced him to drag out his bandana and mop his face.

"We told him, you see, that if you sorter nagged at him an' kep' him riled up, an' he wanted

to clear out any time, we'd hang up another hammock for him in our shanty."

At the conclusion of this tale the Captain rocked back and forth, roaring boisterously.

Abbie was too stunned to be angry. Hiding her face behind the oven door, she flushed with mortification as she contrasted her real self with the cenotaph of perfection Zenas Henry had reared to her. With her sensitive conscience, being overestimated was far more galling than being underestimated; it was a tragedy—a falsity that must be set right. Undoubtedly she ought to make a full confession to the artless Captain. The reputation that Zenas Henry had built up for her betrayed, most ingenuously, his disappointment in her. Alas, poor Zenas Henry! Yet even though she had failed to fulfill his dreams there was still time to do a bit of masquerading and not overthrow Captain Phineas' ideal. Should she let this simple-minded creature go on believing her the paragon that her husband had led him to think her?

Between honesty and artifice she wavered.

Certainly Zenas Henry had gone to great lengths to create the rôle he had conceived. Why should she not speak the lines thrust into her

mouth? The Three Captains should be told some time in the future; indeed they would, no doubt, discover the true facts for themselves. But for the present she would live the character assigned her —take her cue and follow it.

This decision made, no actress ever rushed into a drama with more spirit than Abbie!

First she won her audience with a ringing laugh.

Then she said:

"I don't wonder Zenas Henry was astonished when you offered him a home. Why, he has been pitying you three men, living down there on the beach all by yourselves."

"He warn't much off his course there," admitted Captain Phineas soberly. "We are not bein' carried to the skies on what you could call flowery beds of ease—not exactly. We all thought the shanty was 'bout right till we came up here the day before yesterday. Since then we've been pretty down in the mouth. Captain Jonas is too glum to speak; an' Captain Benjamin has such bad rheumatism in his foot that all he'll do is to lie in his bunk an' groan. A sorry crew we are!"

Now Abbie was a born nurse. Zenas Henry declared she could no more hear of illness and not offer a remedy than a fly can keep out of a

pan of milk. His rheumatism had been successfully routed and news of another case immediately spurred her to action as does the bugle the cavalry charger.

"What does Captain Benjamin do when he has these attacks?" she asked quickly.

"Do? Why mostly he whines an' cusses."

Abbie smiled.

"I don't mean that! Doesn't he put anything on his foot to ease the pain? Don't the rest of you wrap it up for him?"

"My land, marm! You don't know Captain Benjamin!" ejaculated Captain Phineas Taylor. "Why he'd no more let anybody touch that foot than he'd cut off his head. Not one of us dares come within hailin' distance of him for fear we'll hit it."

"I know." Abbie nodded, at the same time peeping into the oven and turning her pies that they might brown on the other side. "My mother had that sort of rheumatism for years. I was the only person that could make her comfortable. I'm sure if I could see that foot of Captain Benjamin's I could bandage it up so he would feel better."

"No doubt you could, marm—no doubt you could—there ain't a shadder of doubt about it!

She glanced at them mischievously.

The Three Captains looked sheepish.

"Now we must be good friends for Zenas Henry's sake," she continued with her most winning smile. "This, I suppose, is Captain Jonas Baker——"

"Your servant, marm!" broke in Captain Jonas, springing to his feet and saluting her much as he might have saluted his country's flag.

"And this is Captain Benjamin Todd in the hammock? Don't get up, Captain Todd."

"I can't get up, marm," snapped Captain Benjamin Todd. Then realizing that he had been ungracious he explained more mildly:

"I have a bad attack of rheumatism."

"I'm sorry to hear that!" Abbie appeared greatly surprised. "What sort of rheumatism is it? My mother had rheumatism for thirty years."

And as Captain Phineas Taylor stood by, his eyes opening wider and wider, Abbie marched fearlessly up to Captain Benjamin Todd and gently put her hand upon that sacred foot. Captain Benjamin did not even wince.

"You ought to have this done up in liniment and flannel," asserted she, with an air of authority.

"I have the things right here, an' you must let me bandage it just as I did my mother's."

Captain Benjamin was too astounded to demur.

"An' if you'll believe me," Captain Phineas Taylor afterward related to Zenas Henry, "the next we knew she had Captain Benjamin's foot in hot water, an' was windin' it up in yards of flannel till it was the size of three, an' all the time Benjamin was sorter blinkin', like as if he was a cat bein' rubbed under the ear."

Notwithstanding the engrossing nature of her occupation, Abbie, in the meantime, was missing no details of the room. She observed the untidiness, the smoking stove-pipe, the cold that crept in at the cracks; she saw, too, the tin dish placed to catch the water leaking through the roof, the mending with which Captain Jonas wrestled. She was a thoroughly feminine woman. Strong within her surged the instinct of the mother and of the home-maker. Again she glanced about. With lightning speed she calculated the evils that should be remedied; and with equal speed she arrived at the hopeless conclusion that none of them could be remedied while the Three Captains remained amid their present surroundings. When she

finally spoke it was to hurl a bomb into the midst of the wind-racked hovel:

"Captain Benjamin Todd can't stay here," she said. "It is much too cold an' damp. If he is ever to get rid of his rheumatism he must come up to our house so I can take care of him until the weather is warmer. I can't let him stay here."

Let, indeed!

"But he can't step, marm!" objected Captain Jonas Baker.

"He can't touch his foot to the floor!" Captain Phineas Taylor hastened to add.

"I can't stir out of this hammock!" was Captain Benjamin Todd's sharp ejaculation.

"Nonsense!"

With a single word Abbie swept their protests aside.

"I reckon he could go if he was carried," she declared.

"But we haven't anything to carry him in. Besides, he'd never let us h'ist him into a wagon if we had one."

"What's the matter with a wheelbarrow? You can borrow one, can't you?"

"Yes, marm, but——"

"Well, you go an' get it. Bring it right in here an' we'll lift him in carefully, an' bundle him all up so he won't get chilled. If you wheel it gently I am sure you won't jar him."

So, as Zenas Henry drove into the yard returning from the Junction with his grain, it was a strange cavalcade that came winding its way toward him over the untracked snow! First walked his wife, erect with triumph; then followed Captain Jonas Baker and Captain Phineas Taylor wheeling what appeared to be a mass of rags, but out of which the head of Captain Benjamin Todd presently emerged.

"I've brought 'em all up to stay a while," called Abbie to her amazed husband. Later, when they were by themselves, she explained:

"Captain Benjamin will have to have his foot bandaged five or six times a day, an' though I shall tend to it myself he's got to have somebody to wait on him—that's why I brought along Captain Jonas Baker. As for leaving that Captain Phineas Taylor alone in the shanty, I just didn't dare to. He might slip an' break his leg, or he might die suddenly."

"But ain't you takin' too much on your hands?"

questioned Zenas Henry, his eyes aglow with admiration.

"Oh, no. I want to do it. That hut's an awful forlorn place, Zenas Henry."

Accordingly the Three Captains—the three laziest men in all Wilton—were housed beneath the Brewster roof at Abbie's own request. Astonishment still held them spellbound, held them and Zenas Henry as well. Had they known it, a wave of the same wonder transfixed Abbie herself!

Alone in her room that evening she smiled ruefully into her mirror, whimsically observing to her other self:

"This comes of playing I'm somebody I'm not! Well, I begun it—it's my own doing—an' now I've just got to keep right on making believe. It's too late to do anything else! I am dreadful sorry for those Three Captains; they're the most miserable souls. They need something done for 'em if anyone ever did. But I will say that about the last thing I ever expected to do was *to run an Old Men's Home!*"

CHAPTER V

THE MARINER'S HAVEN

DAYS came and went, weeks passed, and still Abbie had not abandoned her assumed character, or confessed the fraud she was practicing upon her household.

"Of course the time is coming," she whispered to herself, "when I've got to turn those three men out, straighten up the house, an' set Zenas Henry to doing something. I wouldn't have thought I could stand it as long as this! Why, there isn't one thing where it belongs, I do believe. Everything's moved—everything! What those Three Captains don't contrive to rock into, or to tip over, isn't worth naming. As for Zenas Henry, he's going to the dogs! I was beginning to get him straightened out a little before they came, but now he's just dropped back into idling an' smoking."

Abbie gave the mop in her hand a spirited twist

as she wrung it out in the pail of water, and went on cleaning the pantry floor.

"Those Three Captains are the most wretched beings alive!" she continued under her breath, after a thoughtful pause. "It does my heart good to see how they have picked up since they've had three square meals a day. Captain Benjamin is getting round spry as a cricket."

She smiled softly, then stiffened.

"But now that he's so much better, there is no call for them to stay here any longer. The Lord can't expect me to take care of all the lonesome men in this town. I've taken one! If every other woman in Wilton would do the same, they'd all be provided for. Yes, I'm going to tell 'em the whole thing pretty soon, an' then start over again with just Zenas Henry an' a tidy house."

But the time for this threatened disclosure was never auspicious.

A morning dawned when Abbie awakened with resolution throbbing at the tip of her tongue; but Captain Benjamin Todd chanced to be worse that day. It would be brutal to turn him out. Another morning came. Hot with purpose she started for the sitting-room only to pause on the threshold at hearing:

"An' we were makin' for the Horn, the water hissin' along our sides like a sarpent in the grass. The *Nancy*——"

Alas, Captain Phineas was off on the adventures of his beloved brig. She could not bear to burst in, and cut him short.

Once more she tried.

This time it was evening, just after the lamps were lighted. But in the warm glow of the room Zenas Henry and the three wayfarers who sat smoking seemed so at peace that their calm was far too holy a thing to be ruthlessly disturbed.

Abbie tiptoed away.

Surely morning was a better time!

And so the supreme moment never arrived, and in the meanwhile she found herself more and more absorbed in the part she was playing. For the drama going on about her was not without fascination. To be sure it called upon her forbearance until her nature was strained to the tissue, but this test of her power was, after all, inspiring. A race horse delights in his capacity for speed; and Abbie could not but exult in the discovery that when her patience was most severely taxed, an undreamed-of strength came hither at her bidding. The drama, moreover, was not always tragedy.

It evolved into scenes of simple pleasure when the happiness pervading the household became her own happiness. Furthermore, as it unfolded and the characters became more at ease in their setting, comedy rippled into the lines, lighting them with laughter.

Surely it was a wonderful stage on which they were moving!

Abbie realized, as the weeks flew by, that to her surprise she was becoming more interested in the actors than in the mere properties surrounding them; more alive to the souls which spoke, than the dead things that all her life she had guarded with such anxious care. And therefore, although her treasures were jostled out of place, were even marred or broken, a new restraint stole over her. Gropingly she began to sense that her house had become something more than a mere half dozen spotless rooms.

Nevertheless her traditions were strong, and therefore she was still unable to completely sink her identity in the new rôle, as art demanded that she should. The woman of sympathy battled with the New England-bred housewife. At variance with herself poor Abbie struggled on, sometimes feeling a coward that she did not cling to her

methodical past and denounce the present chaos as a sham; sometimes fearing that the tolerance into which she was slipping was weakening all the sterner principles of her bringing-up. With horror she beheld the clockwork of her daily life skip one, two, three, a score of beats. Occasionally she washed Mondays but more often it was Tuesday, Thursday, or even Saturday before her erratic family could be prevailed upon to wriggle into fresh garments. Baking, sweeping, cleaning, instead of being rites and ceremonies, now degenerated into casual and informal events.

Certainly she was becoming thoroughly demoralized!

With the desperate desire to preserve at least some shreds of her ancestorial heritage she timidly resumed her demonstrations of orderliness. They had never been very successful with Zenas Henry, even when he was the sole disturber. Now there were three others even more cheerfully disregardless of pegs, shelves, and cupboards; three who rumpled the mats into billows; who scattered the *Trumpeter* about; who defied the stripes in the wall-paper; and who saw no advantages in the china frog. To dodge the steps of four rioters and put in place the myriads of articles strewn

tain Phineas," Captain Jonas would say. "*She* won't like it!"

"Shut the door after you, Captain Benjamin. You know *she* hates it left open."

"Put that tidy over the back of the chair when you sit down, Zenas Henry; *she* don't want us leanin' on it."

The first question when any of them stepped over the threshold was: "Where's *she?*"

Let her go to the kitchen, unconsciously they all gravitated to the kitchen!

Let her drop into a chair in the sitting-room, immediately the sitting-room became the only desirable spot in the house!

To find herself enthroned as absolute monarch of the white cottage was a tragedy to Abbie.

"Here they are, ready to lie down an' let me walk on 'em!" she murmured. "It makes me clean ashamed of myself! What if I was to tell 'em I'm just a sham—that I've been pretending all the time; an' that many a day when they've thought me kind I've been on the verge of sweeping 'em outdoors—the Three Captains an' Zenas Henry too! I ought to tell 'em."

But the curtain was scarcely up on the first act

of a drama that was proving decidedly interesting. She could not tell them yet.

"I don't wonder folks go on the stage," she whispered. "There's nothing like this losing all track of your bringing-up. Why, I'd never have believed I could drop into letting things go as I have. I actually haven't washed any of my dishes in but two dish-waters for months, an' some of 'em ain't had but one!"

None of the four anarchists who so ruthlessly laid waste her laws suspected how real was the havoc he was creating in her life. So well did she act her part that each beheld only a woman who in kindness, sympathy, and patience outshone every other woman as completely as the sun eclipses the beam of the lighthouse.

As the play went on, December whitened into January. But sailless and somber as was the ocean, and piercing as were the gales that raced over the dunes, the cottage on the hill was ever aglow with good cheer. In view of this fact visits to Silas Nickerson's store became less and less frequent. Captain Phineas or Captain Jonas went occasionally at mail time, it is true, but it was usually on some errand, and they did not loiter to chat as had been their custom.

Silas, who did not fancy the lonely afternoons he now spent in the rear of his shop, observed sarcastically to Captain Phineas:

"So Abbie Brewster's got you Three Captains under her thumb, along with Zenas Henry!"

"There's no thumb about it, Silas," laughed Captain Phineas good-naturedly. "All she's got to do is to crook her little finger, an' we dip our colors. I tell you what—she's 'bout the finest woman ever made!"

Silas sniffed.

How could he understand that to the Three Captains, perching on an egg-case or on the top of a sugar-barrel—once a luxury to be coveted—now appeared singularly unattractive when contrasted with a rocking-chair in Abbie Brewster's sunny living-room?

Each day the scant round of chores demanded by decency was quickly finished, and then to hours of idleness!

Friction there sometimes was, to be sure, for Zenas Henry's almanacs and Captain Benjamin Todd's rheumatism frequently issued conflicting predictions as to probable storms. In one instance this dissension raged fiercely, Zenas Henry declaring there would be no snow for forty-eight hours,

while Captain Benjamin, writhing with acute twinges in his ankle, insisted that snow would fall before morning. To Zenas Henry's amazement it fell, and so angry was he at having his special province invaded by a triumphant dilettante that he wrathfully tore his almanac into fragments and it was an hour before Abbie could calm his rage. Feuds, too, took place over the four pipes which were continually getting misplaced or mixed up. And alas for the four pair of spectacles, so similar as to render instant identification impossible!

Abbie took her turn at annoyances as well as the others. Although her family, in order to please her, made periodic sallies into the realms of order, in reality they were aliens within its borders and were always glad to retreat to their own country of chaos and confusion. Here they felt thoroughly at home. Their favorite vice took one particularly exasperating form: whenever any one of them came into the house he invariably tossed his woolen cap on the kitchen table as he passed through the room. Over and over again Abbie as patiently picked up the caps, hanging them on the pegs beside the door. At last, however, she wearied of the monotony.

"I'm not going to have another of these hats on my cooking table!" she called sharply after Captain Benjamin one day. "You take an' hang your cap up on the nail—that's what it's for!"

But this argument proved empty logic to one whose possessions had been in a state of pandemonium for over half a century.

Abbie's anger rose.

She was tired of finding caps in the flour, or mixed up with her bread-board.

"I shan't say anything more about these hats," she finally announced. "I just warn you, that's all!"

It chanced that Captain Jonas, who entered at the moment, sauntered through, throwing his cap on the table as he went.

Abbie waited until he disappeared; then, with flashing eye she locked up the offending object in the cupboard drawer.

Captain Phineas had, in the meantime, been chopping kindlings and now followed Captain Jonas into the house. Down went his cap on the ironing-table, and was as promptly gathered up and consigned to imprisonment with the other. Later in the morning the Three Captains, assisted by Zenas Henry, began a surreptitious search for

their hats. They were unwilling to appeal to Abbie who was working so intently as to be unconscious of their dilemma; they knew too well her opinion of disorder. But the hats could not be found! After a whispered consultation Zenas Henry crept to the attic from which he returned with two faded yachting caps, eagerly seized upon by the unfortunates. These in time, however, shared the fate of their predecessors.

Within two days the cupboard drawer was crammed with hats!

Zenas Henry was puzzled, but he continued to produce coverings of every variety.

Then the end came.

There were no more hats, and Captain Jonas could not go out because he hadn't one. Captain Phineas, always the soul of generosity, was moved to pity and offered his, only to have it disappear as if caught up in a chariot of fire. As for Captain Benjamin's hat—it had gone long ago! For a time Zenas Henry's fore-and-aft did duty for the quartet, then, presto, that also vanished!

"Now we're in a mess!" ejaculated Zenas Henry. "Here we are with hair as thin as six-months-old babies—takin' cold every time the

Was there a soul in Wilton who did not remember it?

"Well," continued Captain Phineas. "That ship drove her nose into the bar hard an' fast, you recollect. They tried every way to get her off an' at last, you know, they tossed her cargo overboard in the hope of floatin' her at high tide. But it warn't no use—she just pounded herself to pieces like as if she'd been a cockle-shell."

The words brought back the memory of his own ship. In an effort to shake off the thought, he crowded more tobacco into his pipe and hurried on:

"Most of the stuff they dropped over the side came ashore on the beach above here, an' among other things we fished up a case of some sort of patent emulsion. The corks were all loosened by the water an' of course, if it was goin' to be any good, it had got to be took right away. It was too fine a thing to waste. So we decided to take it ourselves."

He stopped a moment, puffing rings of smoke into the air.

"There was a sight of it—dozens of bottles—an' as warm weather was on the way, we'd got to work lively to get it took up before it spoiled."

Abbie understood his feeling perfectly. Hadn't she eaten many a thing to save it? Her mind traveled to a certain large basket of peaches that Dave had once brought home, and she remembered how she had found some of the top ones *specked*, and how she could not make it seem right to eat any of the perfect fruit while the imperfect remained. Each day the *specked* ones increased. How she had raced with nature for the boon of one unspotted peach! And when, by and by, she reached the bottom of the basket and realized that she had tasted nothing but overripe peaches somehow it had not seemed fair. Yet if she were to do the thing over again to-morrow how could she plan it any other way? Perhaps Captain Phineas had discovered a more satisfactory path out of the difficulty. She leaned forward eagerly.

"I got a board an' a piece of charcoal," the Captain was saying, "an' went to figgerin' just how much each of us had got to take a day to get the bottles emptied before the end of May. Afterward we set about emptyin' 'em."

"We just did!" reiterated Captain Benjamin, to whom the reminiscence was obviously not at all pleasant.

"Did you do it?" asked Abbie.

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"Did we do it? Ask Benjamin did we do it!" Triumph was unconcealed.

"Why, Mis' Brewster, on June second you couldn't have found a thing in those bottles but the corks! The only trouble was it made us all so stout. My clothes pinched me somethin' awful; an' it was much as Captain Jonas could do to get into his dory. As for Captain Benjamin, he puffed an' wheezed like a tugboat. *But we got it took up!*"

Abbie rose, putting her work aside.

"I'm glad," she said simply. "It would have been dreadful to waste anything that could do folks so much good as that."

For a moment she stood beside the table, stripping the wrapper off the weekly paper.

It was seven o'clock and at precisely that hour she always began reading the Junction *Trumpeter* aloud to her household. They heard it backward and forward, upside down, and inside out until a new paper came.

To-night the issue was a fresh one.

"Now," declared Abbie, after glancing an instant over the unfolded sheet, "I'll read the *Trumpeter* to you if you think you can keep your eyes open. I've no mind, though, to spend my breath

on a lot of nodding mandarins, as I did yesterday."

Abbie's method of reading the paper was a rigid one. She insisted upon the undivided attention of her audience, and in order to insure this result she stopped every now and then and compelled her hearers to repeat the last word she had read. If one of them failed in this ordeal her rule was that they all should go to bed. The four men understood that the penalty would be relentlessly enforced and therefore, the moment she resumed her seat beside the lamp, they straightened themselves and stretched their eyes very wide open.

Deliberately Abbie smoothed out the paper and began reading from the upper left-hand corner of the sheet. She always read systematically column after column regardless of what her listeners wished to hear.

"The revenue cutter *Alert* was sighted off Martin's Shoals Thursday morning at sunrise——" she wheeled on Captain Jonas.

"*Sunrise!*" he shouted promptly.

"and signaled the Shoals Life-Saving Station—Zenas Henry!"

"*Station!*" Zenas Henry answered with the force of a cannon-shot.

Abbie went on with her reading.

"Captain Scudder of the Station responded to the signals an' read a code message wigwagged from the cutter." She turned on Captain Benjamin.

"*Cutter!*" All the power of Captain Benjamin's mighty lungs went into the word.

On she went, testing her audience constantly.

Then all at once she cut short a paragraph concerning Bartley Howes' white mare, Peppersarce.

"What was I reading about, Captain Phineas?" she demanded.

"What? Eh? What was you readin' about? Why—'bout—'bout——"

Abbie folded the paper.

"We'll go to bed," announced she.

"But I only lost myself a jiffy," protested the offender.

"We'll go to bed," repeated Abbie, inexorably.

The four men filed meekly into the kitchen and took their lamps from the shelf over the sink.

"You've knocked our whole evenin', Captain Phineas," lamented Captain Jonas reproachfully. "Now she's made us go to bed! Why on earth couldn't you have pinched yourself or somethin' when you found you were droppin' off?"

"Seems to me, Phineas, you might have kept awake for the sake of the rest of us!" joined in Captain Benjamin, heaping on his censure.

"Here we are all turnin' in at quarter of eight!" growled Zenas Henry. "It's your fault, Captain Phineas, an' I, for one, hope you don't sleep a wink to pay for it!"

were converted to her theories, and therefore they seldom came to see her until April's sunshine had thawed the chill from her sitting-room.

"As for settin' in a place where I can see my breath, an' where I keep coastin' off a chair with its chintz cover frozen to it—I simply can't risk doin' it for anybody," proclaimed Aunt Martha Crocker. "I do pity Dave! Seems to me he takes his life in his hands livin' with that sister of his. Some day she'll kill him!"

Certainly Aunt Martha had ground for her prediction.

Nor was springtime the only season when poor Dave suffered from Abbie's systematic tendencies. Surely some planet must have danced with unalterable rhythm over her head, as she slumbered a babe in her cradle; or at her birth some mischievous fairy must have waved a wand above her in a series of unvarying circles. However that may be, she set forth upon life with the order of the universe so deeply rooted in her being that her entire world became the mere exponent of the law of sequence. She plotted out her year into a series of dates, and as cycle succeeded cycle these dates found her faithfully repeating the duty allotted to it. With the dawn of each September

all thin clothing was washed, ironed, and put aside for the coming spring; after that woolens became the only wear, let the thermometer range whither it would.

Lyman Bearse declared that if Wilton ever found itself bereft of calendars Abbie Brewster could be used instead, and one day when shingling the Howland barn he repeated this jocose assertion to Abbie herself.

"Will you believe me," he related afterward, "that woman never cracked a smile! She only said that if some of the men in town got the habit of doin' things when they'd oughter be done, there wouldn't be so many of 'em settin' round with nothin' to do."

The village profited by Lyman's experience and in consequence, when a particularly dilatory summer retarded the ripening of the currants, thus working havoc with the day set for jelly-making, her neighbors chuckled to see her fidget, but they did their chuckling behind closed blinds.

Simply to follow the rotation of the seasons, however, did not content Abbie. To be entirely at peace she must be ever a little in advance of the turn of the wheel. Often she found it well

nigh impossible to await nature's sane processes, so anxious was she to get ahead with things.

Now could Fate have conjured up a jest more ironic than to link such a woman with a man like Zenas Henry, whose motto had always been:

"Aw, what's the hurry!"

Without method in little things, naturally the larger order failed to interest him. All his life the months had crept up and overtaken him. He never knew what it was to drive, but ever driven he watched each epoch sweep past him and disappear. Early in her married career Abbie had realized that it was only her vigilant prodding that kept him in the race at all.

Throughout the winter she had abandoned him to his own lax devices for there was little to be done, and the advent of the Three Captains had upset what trifling regularity life had assumed. But with the stirring of spring her thoughts leaped forward to a score of duties which, in her New England mind, thronged about the advancing season and *must* be fulfilled.

She made her first suggestions to Zenas Henry gently—then, more forcefully. He passed them over lightly as a bee brushes a hollyhock. With

rising temper she persevered until, irritated by her insistence, he exclaimed:

"Land, Abbie! Can't you let me be? I'm sure I don't see but you work just as hard to keep ahead of things as I do to ketch up with 'em. There's no difference in the *way* we scramble—only in what we're scramblin' *for!*"

Abbie blazed!

"Maybe you'd like it, Zenas Henry, to have April come, an' the ground for your potato patch not even broken. I can just hear you deciding, about July, that perhaps you'd better be plowing up. But I tell you one thing—long's I live in this house you ain't going to fall into any such slothful ways! You are bound to have to scurry anyway, made as you are, an' you may as well scurry to some purpose."

So Zenas Henry scurried!

Once more he was back on the trail over which Abbie had coaxed him when she had come a bride to the Brewster homestead; but now it was a war-path! All his wife's method and forethought were as shackles to his freedom-loving nature. He painted piazza chairs before February's breath was out of the air; he tacked new netting on the screens; he repaired fences; he took off the storm

doors and windows. With resentment he beheld Abbie's calendar in full operation, but he could not denounce it openly, for was he not bound to conceal from the Three Captains every rift within the lute? Heavy clothing was wrested from him and packed away while icicles fringed the eaves, and his fur cap was smothered in camphor before a ravening moth stirred in the egg.

The Three Captains were spared a similar fate only because Abbie did not feel quite justified in exerting her authority over them. Then, too, there was Captain Benjamin's rheumatism—he must not take cold!

The house, in the meantime, was subjected to another of those complete overturnings that leave not an inch of solid ground for foot to tread upon. Everything was scrubbed and scoured. From out the turmoil the Three Captains, strangers to such violent methods of tidiness, daily fled for refuge to Silas Nickerson's store to return at sundown, when tranquillity once more reigned.

But for Zenas Henry there was no such escape!

Abbie rooted about the house and barn dragging forth his neglected tasks.

She had a genius for appearing with some nag-

ging job if he ever got comfortable anywhere—something that must be done right away.

"You'd think spring couldn't go on unless that old bulkhead had new hinges," murmured Zenas Henry in a whisper. "I'm sick of rushin' round with a hammer in one hand, an' a saw in the other."

Had Abbie watched Zenas Henry carefully she might have detected signs of the coming tornado; but of late he had grown so much more controlled that the present outward calm belied his inward storminess. Even while the tempest was rising she ignorantly grasped the very thunderbolts by remarking:

"To-morrow, Zenas Henry, I think you'd better stake out the hotbeds."

Zenas Henry made no reply.

There were mutterings in the silence, but she did not hear them.

Instead, she repeated her request:

"I think you better stake out the hotbeds to-morrow."

"But there ain't goin' to be any to-morrow!" Zenas Henry grimly declared beneath his breath.

Driven to the extent of his patience, he had resolved that, come what might, he would revolt.

He had made all his plans. He would go to bed and stay there until the whirlwind of Abbie's activity blew over!

All the evening he turned this thought over in his mind, perfecting his scheme.

So preoccupied was he that his wife remarked upon his mood, inquiring if he felt well with such kindly interest that he trembled lest she hear the plots that bubbled in his brain.

He slept but fitfully.

The next morning Abbie roused him:

"Zenas Henry! My land! Ain't you up? It's after five this minute. That miserable alarm clock never went off at all!"

Zenas Henry was not surprised at hearing this information.

"Wake up!" repeated Abbie. "It's time to get up."

"I ain't goin' to get up to-day," Zenas Henry observed faintly.

"What!"

"I ain't," he repeated. "I'm goin' to lie right here."

"Are you sick?" questioned his astonished helpmate.

Again he closed his eyes wearily.

"I somehow just want to stay here," he said, drawing his hand suggestively across his forehead.

"Landy! He is sick, sure enough!" Abbie whispered in awed tones.

She crept out and, crossing the hall, tapped on Captain Phineas' door.

"Zenas Henry's sick—awful sick!" he heard her explain. "Some of you Captains must get up straight away and tend to the chores and milking."

Now as all the Three Captains in no very delicate terms had set apart the early hours of the day as entirely undesirable for labor, Zenas Henry could not but bury his face in the pillows and laugh. Then raising himself on his elbow, he listened. Downstairs he could hear the family moving excitedly about, and presently he caught the voice of Captain Jonas asking how he was, and what was the matter. His concern was so genuine that for an instant Zenas Henry's conscience smote him. A moment later, however, Abbie began to issue her list of orders, and he nestled contentedly back among the feathers.

"I'll bet the Three Captains never worked like that a day in all their lives. They'll see how good it is!"

But Zenas Henry's moral sensibilities were once more uncomfortably aroused when Abbie tiptoed in with his breakfast. The plate was hot, the toast crisp and brown. Then fell the cadence of those brisk tones he knew so well, and forthwith the clamorings of his conscience ceased.

"Here's your breakfast, Zenas Henry. You eat it right up, so I can wash the dishes. Where do you feel bad?"

She stood over the invalid, glancing first at the clock and then at the door, as if she had every moment planned and could scarcely spare time to listen to his reply.

"I don't know," he answered vaguely. "I just feel as if I'd like to lie here forever."

"Got any pain?"

"Don't feel any."

"Headache?"

She took a hitch toward the threshold.

"No."

Abbie looked baffled.

"Well, you lie here for a while," she said. "I'm going to steep you some camomile tea, an' get you a bottle of bitters. Those will set you to rights quicker'n anything else."

Out she bustled.

Then, as he heard her giving more orders to the Three Captains, his last weak compunction vanished. Even the camomile tea and the large bottle of bitters which subsequently made their appearance at his bedside, were but microscopic ripples in the vast sea of his tranquillity. Fanned by a pine-scented breeze, he lay between the fresh sheets, and heard the Three Captains work. Paradise had never seemed so near before!

Since the first day of invalidism proved so ideal, he tried a second—then a third. By the fourth day he was entirely resigned to dozing quietly in the sunny room; having his meals brought to him; and listening, with appreciative smiles, to the ring of the hammers, as the Three Captains staked out the hotbeds.

But on the fifth day an unexplainable stillness suddenly fell upon the white cottage. To be sure hammers could be heard occasionally, but their blows were spasmodic, and frequently interspersed by long tobacco-laden pauses and fragments of gossip. Abbie's voice was silent. Evidently she was not outside urging on her reluctant host. Instead, the constant jar of the sewing machine vibrated within doors; he could also hear the snip and clatter of shears, and the stifled whisper of

some other woman asking questions. Who was it? What could they be doing? It was not Abbie's *season* for sewing.

When she brought up his supper that night he inquired—idly, at first; but on noticing that she evaded his queries, he became more insistent. Abbie's obvious embarrassment whetted his curiosity. The mystery went on for several days more.

The Three Captains, in the meanwhile, were left to themselves and, to make deductions from the fumes arising, spent much of their time smoking on the sheltered woodpile just beneath the invalid's window. It was this alluring aroma which set Zenas Henry thinking of his own pipe. Primarily a whim, the craving rapidly transformed itself into a necessity. He suggested to Abbie that maybe a smoke might do him good, but she instantly crushed all hope of the remedy by protesting:

"Well, I guess not! You might set the bed clothes afire. Besides, it isn't the thing for a man in your condition."

"What condition?"

"Well, the condition you're in," replied she, ambiguously.

"What do you mean?"

Abbie hesitated.

"Now I don't want to get you nervous about yourself, Zenas Henry, but I may as well tell you that I've sent over to Sawyer's Falls for the doctor to come an' see you to-morrow. My father's last sickness began just like this. He didn't seem to have much of anything the matter with him at first."

"Then what happened?"

"Why, he just gave up, an' didn't want to do a stroke of work; an' by an' by his strength all went. He never got up again—he pined away."

"How long did he pine?" questioned her husband, somewhat disquieted.

"Let me see! It was something above eight weeks. He never realized his strength was slipping away till he went to use it—then he hadn't any!"

Zenas Henry became uneasy.

"Of course I don't want you to go worrying 'bout yourself," concluded Abbie, rising from the foot of the bed, where she had perched while speaking, "but it is always well *to be prepared.*"

The words, so familiar from her lips, fell to-day not only with unwonted impressiveness but they

echoed with most unpleasant cadence long after she had gone down-stairs.

"I wonder if my strength is slippin' away," speculated the invalid thoughtfully. "My hands do look whiter. I wonder if I've grown thin. Maybe I *am* pinin'! I may really be sick an' not know it. Pshaw! Course I'm not!"

Nevertheless, the possibility recurred and was not to be laughed away.

"Maybe I didn't want to stake out the hotbeds because I was sick. I may have begun to pine already. I'd like to get up an' see if my strength has slipped away. If I had an ax or a hammer in my hand, I could tell quick enough. If Abbie would only go out somewheres I believe I'd get up an' see just how I do feel. I'd like to have a good look at myself in the glass!"

By noontime his paradise had become an inferno!

Abbie entered it promptly at twelve o'clock with his dinner.

"Do you s'pose, Zenas Henry," she timidly asked, "that you're able to let me drive down to the village to do a couple of errands? The Three Captains are here, an' one of 'em will sit in the next room in case you want anything. I wouldn't

leave you, but there are some last things—I mean some things—that I want to get."

The words *last things* did not escape Zenas Henry.

He struggled to conceal his eagerness, and grant the request with becoming dignity. Granting permission to Abbie was not a common experience.

"Y—e—s! I reckon I can spare you," he replied deliberately.

"You are sure you feel able?" she asked again.

"Yes, I—I—can get on."

Her solicitousness made little chills creep up his spine. He wondered if old Mr. Howland had had those queer chills when he was pining.

The desire to have his wife go became feverish, and he found himself almost in a frenzy when at last he heard the wheels whirl down the drive and die away in the road. Then he called to Captain Benjamin:

"There ain't any need of your sittin' in that next room, Captain Benjamin. You go down in the yard with the others, an' if I want anything I'll whistle."

The Captain went but too gladly.

After he had gone Zenas Henry peered guiltily about, then throwing back the coverings he stood

mighty comfortable. Here's one with an urn on it, for all the world the shape of the Howlands' best sugar bowl! The corner of the page is turned down, too. I'll bet anything Abbie was goin' to put that sugar bowl on me! She was. I've stood a good deal, but I won't stand that! Abbie knows well 'nough that I never liked that tea set—I've said so a hundred times. She wanted to get our dishes the same shape, when we were married, but I wouldn't let her. An' now warn't it a mean trick of her to put that sprig china on me when I was dead! I shall tell her so. I may's well say some things before I go. Abbie is always repeatin' folk's last words. I'll have some last words, an' one of 'em is that——"

"Zenas Henry!"

Abbie stood in the doorway.

"I'm glad you've come back," roared Zenas Henry, in a voice loud with rage, "'cause I've got some things I want to say to you. For weeks you've been drivin' me round, never lettin' me sit down an' smoke without feelin's if I was a criminal. I may's well tell you right now that I ain't been sick at all! I just got so darn tired of bein' jogged on, day in an' day out, that I went to bed to get away from the screens, an' the busted bulk-

head, an' all the rest of the chores. Not one of 'em needed doin' till summer! But you'd never have slept a wink if you hadn't set me workin' at 'em this winter. Now I've made up my mind that I ain't goin' to live on this schedule plan any more. Never again shall I pack my fur hat away the tenth of February, even if the moths do eat it up on the eleventh!"

He spoke with such vehemence that Abbie, incapable of reply, dropped feebly into the nearest chair.

"The Lord never meant us to live any such way," continued Zenas Henry, earnestly. "Why, if He'd wanted to, He could have fixed it so every Sunday 'twould be clear; every Monday 'twould cloud up; every Tuesday 'twould rain—year after year! He could have had the buds pop open the first day of May; an' all the leaves drop off the first day of October. But He knew it would drive us all crazy. So He set to thinkin', an' every year's been different since the time of Adam. He's let us know 'bout what to expect, but He ain't let us be too cock sure when to expect it. You go to work an' cover up the geraniums an' He never sends a frost; but just you leave 'em uncovered, an' He'll nip 'em! I reckon His idea is to make

things happen we ain't figgered on, so'st we'll have to use our wits. That's why you've got to stop tryin' to map the world out accordin' to that list of dates you've got pasted up over the bureau. After this"—he fairly towered over his wife—"we'll talk over when I shall put my fur hat in camphor. It's goin' to be all kinds of times! An' we'll talk over the chores, too. I'm willin' to do some odd jobs every day, but I ain't ever again goin' to keep at 'em mornin', noon, an' night."

Still speechless, Abbie rose to go.

"Now there's just one thing more," concluded Zenas Henry, turning and facing her accusingly. "You ain't a-goin' to buy that sugar bowl tombstone for me! You must have known perfectly well that it was the shape of your mother's green an' white set that I've always hated so. I wouldn't have believed, Abbie, that you'd have done anything so against my wishes!"

"It ain't the same shape—at least, not quite the same," remonstrated his wife weakly.

"Well, it's mighty near it."

"Ours had handles that went so."

She approached, and looking over his shoulder at the catalog he still held, traced with trembling finger the outline of the disputed parts.

Then Abbie did a thing she never had done before in all the months of their life together—she began to sob!

"Why, Abbie—my—my—dear! What's the matter?"

Awkwardly Zenas Henry put his arms round her as she rested her head against his sleeve.

"I'm so tired!" she whispered. "I got dreadfully worried about you, an' how I was to get on; an' what Captain Benjamin would do if he had to go back to that shanty. The mourning doesn't fit, either. An' now you don't like—like your—tombstone—an' I took so much pleasure picking it out!"

Very gently Zenas Henry drew her closer.

"Don't you think any more 'bout it!" he said. "We'll pack all this black truck off in the next missionary barrel. An' do you know—I think I kinder take to the notion of bein' buried under that sugar bowl after all, for somehow it has sweetened us up a bit; but you ain't goin' to buy it for me yet awhile. Now you stop cryin' an' take off your hat, while I get into my things an' hunt up the Three Captains. I want to thank 'em for makin' the hotbeds!"

He chuckled.

As the vision of the Captains' chagrin drifted vividly before Abbie's imagination a smile overspread her tear-stained face.

"An' you ain't mad at me for wasting all this money?"

She motioned toward the outlay on the bed.

"Not if you ain't mad at me for upsettin' your calculations."

They both laughed.

Then, for the first time, Zenas Henry bent down and shyly kissed his wife's cheek.

His blood throbbed hotly, and fragments of ill-assorted harmonies which he did not understand sang in his ears.

Terrified by the riot of these new sensations, he turned abruptly and fled from the room.

CHAPTER VII

THE UNMAKING OF A THEOLOGIAN

EVEN as a thunderstorm drifts off leaving the skies behind it flooded with azure, so the blast of Zenas Henry's wrath cleared the heavens of the Brewster home. Abbie's zeal subsided into a modified strenuousness, while Zenas Henry's increased to a more reasonable alertness. Together they discussed problems of house and garden, each yielding in some measure to the wishes of the other. In consequence peace reigned and within its halo the Three Captains, all unconscious of aught but the commotion attendant on annual cleaning, joyfully returned from their temporary banishment.

Wilton was now gay with the beauty of early spring. Into its harsh winds had crept the breath of the south, transforming dried grasses into ten-

or empty; watched for the return of the fishing fleet, and related at evening just which fishermen had been forced to lay to and whistle for a breeze.

All forecasts of the weather they tactfully ceded to Zenas Henry, for, although they had seafaring notions concerning wind and cloud, they were sometimes wrong, and Captain Benjamin's rheumatism was now too feeble a power to aid him in making infallible predictions.

Thus as this strangely varied household daily drew closer together, each grew to realize the subjects that stirred up strife, and more and more carefully avoided troubling the waters.

The meteorite of dissension which without warning fell among them, shot down from a smiling sky!

One unlucky day an evangelist came to the village and Abbie, a stanchly religious person, took the unquestioning Zenas Henry to the meeting. Now Abbie had never discussed religion with Zenas Henry, for up to this time it had been enough for him that she accepted the teachings of the tiny white-spired church in the village. It had been his mother's church as well, a fact which rendered his faith in it all the stronger. Just what he believed Abbie did not know, and, it being his

nature to take for granted everything requiring introspection, she doubted if he knew himself. He had lived in a sort of religious somnambulism from which he had never been roused.

On the evening of this meeting, however, Zenas Henry—who had dozed most of the afternoon—was abnormally alert. As he listened to the dogmas presented he began, for the first time, to turn them over in his unexercised brain, and from out its dormant recesses he discovered a swarm of counter opinions awakening. These rose and stretched themselves lazily, then became clamorous. The novelty of unearthing opinions upon such a subject astonished and fascinated him. It was like stumbling upon buried treasure.

As he and Abbie walked home both were silent until suddenly, as if casting a bomb into paradise, Zenas Henry broke out:

"I don't believe it, do you?"

"Believe what?" queried Abbie in surprise.

"I say," repeated Zenas Henry, "that I don't believe a word that man said—it's all poppy-cock! Don't you think so?"

"What do you believe?" Abbie questioned evasively.

Slowly, almost painfully, the man dragged

forth his lethargic philosophy while, without comment, Abbie heard him to the end. Afterward an awful stillness followed.

Finally she spoke:

"Then you're a Universalist!" she stated in appalled accents. "That's what you are!"

"Is that what you are?" asked the unabashed Zenas Henry, with a naïve ignorance of the chasm into which he had just fallen.

"No!"

The shock of this revelation produced another silence more terrible than the last. Once more it was Abbie who broke it. This time she spoke in quite an altered voice—a voice both of assurance and of playfulness—as if soothing a child who persists in wilfulness:

"Now you know you don't really believe what you're saying, Zenas Henry. That man has snarled you all up. Don't you think any more about it." She slipped her hand reassuringly into his.

But Zenas Henry had found himself, and he had no mind to desert this newly discovered and interesting acquaintance.

"I ain't snarled up," he responded stubbornly.

"I mean just what I say! I s'posed you thought that way, too, Abbie."

Abbie was confounded!

"It's awful!" she declared at last, withdrawing her hand.

"Oh, no! 'Tain't awful," denied Zenas Henry, cheerfully. "Course it's a sight nicer for us to always think alike, but it doesn't really make any difference."

"It does make a difference," announced Abbie. "I *never* shall live with a Universalist!"

The suddenness of the situation combined with his wife's agitation kept Zenas Henry from replying. He considered the affair too trivial to be tragic, and serenely trusted that it would pass with the darkness.

But to Abbie, who must filter her every act through an exacting conscience, the incident was no mere episode of a drama that would sanguinely unravel. Zenas Henry was without the fold! Such a barrier was insurmountable! The words: *Be ye not yoked with unbelievers*, burned in her brain; and she blamed herself bitterly that she had married before this vital matter had been settled between them. All night she battled, mapping out her future; and morning, which Zenas Henry

had expected would bring concord with its sunshine, brought simply a hush heavy with foreboding.

Each member of the family sensed that a crisis was at hand.

Abbie, pale from loss of sleep, broke the stillness of the sitting-room where they were all assembled:

"Zenas Henry an' I," she began in a tone cold with repressed feeling, "have had a serious difference. It turns out that he is a Universalist—I never knew it until last night. Now I am a Congregationalist! My father was one, my grandfather, too. All our family were Congregationalists. I've never sat under any other preaching in my life! So, you see, I know what the Congregationalists are doing and where they're going; but as for the Universalists—well, I don't know anything about 'em, an' I don't want to."

She paused for breath.

"Now feeling as I do, it ain't to be expected that I can live with a Universalist. I shall do all I can to make Zenas Henry comfortable because I've bargained to; but as for eating with him, or having anything to do with him; 'twouldn't be right."

Zenas Henry listened, stunned into silence.

The Three Captains were far too overwhelmed to speak.

Abbie herself having defined her course and received no replies to her declaration of war, led the way into the dining-room, where another surprise awaited her family.

The table was laid in customary fashion, but near the window was a small stand where Zenas Henry's breakfast was set forth. Abbie motioned him toward it and, back to back, they sat down. Irresolutely the Three Captains hesitated; then Captain Jonas slipped into his usual place beside Abbie, while Captain Benjamin wriggled into the opposite chair. But Captain Phineas remained standing.

"I s'pose you wouldn't mind," he ventured bravely, "if I took my meal with Zenas Henry. You see, I'm kinder half an' half."

Icily Abbie eyed him, at the same time turning her plate until the flowers on it were right side up.

"My father was a Congregationalist," explained the Captain.

Abbie softened.

"But my mother," went on Captain Phineas, "happened to be a Universalist."

"It isn't for me to say," Abbie responded stiffly, "where you shall eat your meals, Captain Phineas. Everybody's got to follow his own conscience."

"All right then," the undaunted Captain answered, "s'pose this mornin', out of respect to the Universalists, I eat my breakfast with Zenas Henry."

Captain Phineas forthwith collected his food and bore it to the spot opposite the outlaw.

Grim tragedy descended upon the household and so the day passed, Captain Phineas flitting from table to table—first loyal to the Universalists, then to the Congregationalists.

For weeks the home vibrated with disquiet in the midst of which the Three Captains were wretched, being torn between their allegiance to Abbie and their affection for Zenas Henry. Poor, shy Captain Benjamin, who detested broils, and who would have parted with his birthright rather than fight to defend it, observed a mournful silence. Captain Jonas, however, took upon himself the offices of peacemaker only to be routed by Abbie at the outset. Captain Phineas, although quite as much distressed as the others, gayly traveled between Muspelheim and Niffleheim in a

series of unsuccessful attempts to lighten the overcharged atmosphere.

Although Zenas Henry saw the chasm between himself and Abbie widen daily, an ultimate breach between them was as incredible as that the moon should rise at noontide. The entire affair was shrouded in a glamour of unreality; it seemed a supernatural vision—a dream from which he would awaken unaffrighted. In the meantime he tried to bridge the gulf by performing for his wife every trifling duty to which she had formerly been forced to prod him. His thoughtfulness doubled, trebled! Never had the great untamed man been so appealing.

Distance affording perspective, Abbie viewed her husband with that newness of vision with which she might have gazed upon primal man, and suddenly there surged toward him an affection so strong that all her resolution proved a pitiably weak obstruction to hold the flood in check. In recognition of her feebleness she whetted her tongue with unwonted sharpness whenever she felt herself wavering, for she argued that the echo of her own voice might put spine into her collapsing ethics. For the first time she realized that every difference between herself and

Zenas Henry had but served to draw them closer together, and given her husband's powerful personality stronger hold over her.

Perhaps, in his vague way, Zenas Henry was not unconscious of this; or perhaps it was only his determination to conquer that led him to struggle stubbornly to gain Abbie's favor. Certainly man never made greater effort to win the smile of fair lady! For weeks he persisted.

Then one morning he entered the kitchen.

"I noticed that your kindlin's were gettin' low," he said, "so yesterday I hitched up an' brought down from my lot a cord I've had cut an' dryin'. Here's some of 'em. I split 'em for you."

He stooped to fill the woodbox.

"I can't use 'em," Abbie burst out, "there's no good leaving 'em here. I'd rather freeze to death than burn Universalist wood!"

"But you've got to start your fire somehow," argued Zenas Henry.

"I've got a wood lot of my own, an' I can get a man to cut me some from there. I can't use yours—'tain't possible, Zenas Henry."

Abbie's lips closed with such accuracy that it was evident to her husband that her decision admitted of no repeal. She seemed like one of the

early Christians refusing the last opportunity to recant.

Nevertheless he persevered.

"I don't see, when it comes to burnin' wood, that it matters what I believe," he said.

"It does matter," retorted Abbie. "I couldn't take a straw's comfort lighting a stick of those kindlings."

"It seems an awful pity we should go on livin' this way," pleaded Zenas Henry. "Here we all were havin' such a good time together an' now——" his voice trembled.

Abbie looked away.

"It all comes of your taking up with those Universalists," she answered firmly. "I told you at the beginning what 'twould mean, an' my views ain't changed a mite. Was it the Universalists landed on Plymouth Rock? You know it warn't! Was it the Universalists made New England? They've never done anything, fur's I can find out. I wouldn't be one of 'em for the world!"

Zenas Henry winced, but resolving to keep his temper, made no reply. Unluckily he had not inherited four generations of Puritan theology and therefore had no arguments at his tongue's end, as had Abbie.

rebuild the tottering fortress of her theology but instead she sat among its ruins, with neither the strength nor the desire to reconstruct its walls. Yet even as she gave herself up to helpless defeat, conscience, like some wounded creature, raised a cry of reproach. It startled her. Throwing back her head, Abbie clinched her hands and quickened her lagging steps.

By this time she was at the farther edge of the wood, and from the hilltop could look across the rolling land which sloped down toward the river. As she followed its silver outline with her eye, she observed spirals of faint blue smoke curling up from a clump of brush just across the stream. Ever so delicate at first, the blueness became more dense, until it clouded the valley in a film of mist. Then dashes of scarlet darted into the vagueness.

Abbie came to herself.

It was Zenas Henry's wood lot, and it was burning!

She knew how hard he had worked to save money enough to buy that land, how carefully he had thinned the trees. It would be a bitter blow to him if all were swept away!

But on the heel of these thoughts came others. The Lord had veiled His presence by cloud and

fire in ages past; might He not be doing so now? Perhaps if she listened, she might even hear the still small voice rendering judgment between her and Zenas Henry. She waited, fascinated in the interval by jets of flame which now shot higher into heavy canopies of sulphur-colored smoke.

But no voice came!

Instead, she recognized a gathering resolve—she must save Zenas Henry's wood lot!

"I may be thwarting the Lord," she murmured, as she sped down the hill to the river. "I know I ought to be glad to see the wicked punished—but I ain't!"

Fortunately the river was narrow at the foot of the slope, and a leaky punt was drawn up among the flags. Abbie grasped the oars and pushing out into the stream guided the boat to the opposite shore, where she sprang out upon the soggy ground. To arm herself with a branch of alder and begin to beat out the flames took only an instant. But the fire was gaining! On it crept, licking up tufts of dried grass, pine-strewn turf, and little heaps of last year's bronzed oak leaves. It ventured forth with all the coquetry of waves dancing up a beach. Now it ran boldly forward, making courageous spurts into new territory; now it circled

playfully round tree-trunks and fallen logs, only to follow after the advancing host whose ragged vanguard was rapidly sweeping the field.

Abbie was already scorched, blackened, weary, and almost suffocated; but she worked stubbornly on, digging up sandy soil with her hands to heap on the approaching enemy, and battering its fury with stout branches as its onslaught became more perilous. Fight as she would, her foe outranked her. She must have help! In despair she remembered that the nearest house was some two miles distant, and she realized that before she could summon aid it would be too late.

Must she stand powerless and see her husband's property swept from her grasp?

Just at that moment voices arrested her ear. She looked up and saw a group of men with axes in their hands, running down the hill from which she had come. Foremost among them was Zenas Henry! Summoning her remaining strength, she hurried to the boat, and rowed back across the river. Some of the men drew the craft ashore, lifted her from it, and in their excitement sprang in themselves, leaving her and Zenas Henry —together with the Three Captains—to wait until the boat returned.

Abbie hid her scorched hands behind her and, worn out, sank upon the grass; her husband regarded her curiously, but did not speak.

The Three Captains, however, talked loudly.

"I tell you what, Zenas Henry, it's lucky we happened up here to-day to trim the trees! But that lot's doomed. We'll never save it in the world!"

"Yes, I'm afraid you're right, Captain Phineas. It's gone!" Zenas Henry returned with despairing calmness. "I said good-by to it when I first saw it burnin' from the top of the hill."

"See!" broke in Captain Jonas, "the blaze is gettin' into the spruces! That'll be the end. It's no use to fight it now. That fire, Zenas Henry, never kindled way off here by itself; you mark my words—*somebody set that lot a-goin'!*"

Zenas Henry started.

Simultaneously the idle words flashed the same thought into all their minds.

The Three Captains looked at Abbie.

Their action was involuntary—they were scarcely conscious of it themselves, and certainly it was far too slight to be taken as an accusation; but their suspicion broke upon her with as much reality as if they had shouted it.

They knew perfectly well that she and Zenas Henry were not on the best of terms. Beside that, why was she alone here in this out-of-the-way place, on a path so rough and deserted that no sane person would ever choose it for pleasure? And in addition to these compromising facts was the quarrel about the kindlings, another damning circumstance of which the Three Captains were happily ignorant, but which, of course, Zenas Henry would remember.

Everything was against her!

Captain Jonas's thoughtless innuendo had scarcely fallen on the air, however, before Zenas Henry answered with quick decision:

"Nobody set that fire, Captain Jonas. It ain't been burnin' long, an' if anybody had been skulkin' round here Abbie would have seen 'em. She came on ahead just after dinner. We were talkin' 'bout the wood this mornin'," he concluded with an odd smile.

Zenas Henry's word was never questioned by anyone in Wilton. Moreover the Three Captains were heartily ashamed of the thought they had, for the instant, harbored. Sheepishly they ambled away to meet the approaching boat.

A lump rose in Abbie's throat.

Although her husband's words were false, their ring was sincere; not only had he felt no suspicion when he might well have doubted her, but she had even detected a flush of anger creep into his cheek at the hint of her implication in the disaster. Still he asked no question. Touched by his blind faith, she rose and stood beside him.

"It was burning when I got here, Zenas Henry," she whispered.

"Of course it was! It's the dried pine on the ground."

One long look passed between them.

"I want to go back an' help you," was all she said.

"'Tain't work for a woman," replied he, kindly. "You're worn out as 'tis. We men will manage it now."

Nevertheless it was a fight of hours before the flames were subdued and Zenas Henry dared leave the charred tree-trunks. Half the lot had been destroyed, but all was not lost. As through the dusk the blackened toilers returned to the village they agreed that except for Abbie's prompt action, none of Zenas Henry's trees would now be standing.

Yet it was not until he was alone with his wife

in the kitchen that his words of gratitude came. Then, as he bound up her hands, he said awkwardly:

"That whole lot would have gone but for you, Abbie."

"Maybe."

"It would! But do you know I'd rather have lost every stick of it than have you get so burned savin' it."

"I don't care a scrap 'bout my hands. I'd have done a good sight more rather'n have it burn. An'," she added with a happy laugh, "it was Universalist wood, too!"

A dancing light sparkled in her eyes, while beneath the tendrils of hair which had stolen over her cheek surged a flood of color vivid as a rose-mallow.

Again Zenas Henry's blood beat in his veins; again in his ears rung those themes which long since had puzzled him but which now, blending into a triumphant harmony, he suddenly understood.

He drew his wife to his breast.

Closer and closer he held her.

"I love you! I love you!"

The words came from him vehemently.

As Abbie buried her face in his coat with big hungry hands he touched her hair. Then he turned her head toward him and stooping, reverently kissed the soft lips.

"I love you!" he repeated more gently.

CHAPTER VIII

UNSCATHED

THE new-found happiness of Abbie and Zenas Henry leveled mountains of dissension, and brought to them both a deep and wonderful peace.

Abbie's alert conscience, to be sure, was a power never to be lulled into slumber and in consequence one of the first acts it demanded was a full confession of her brief theatrical career:

"I can't bear, Zenas Henry, that you should think too well of me," she concluded, after relating her story. "Besides, I'm all mixed up, an' need you to straighten me out. You see, I've lost myself somehow—making believe all the time, as I have. I've come to really like those Three Captains so much that now I can't for the life of me tell where my acting leaves off, an' where I myself begin."

Zenas Henry smiled.

Never until his marriage had he been granted a glimpse into the intricacies of a woman's conscience, and with wonder he constantly contrasted it with his own less complex nature. He had already gained not only tolerance toward his wife's scruples but also some meager insight into her delicately poised conceptions of right and wrong. There were, nevertheless, many windings of her mind that were still beyond his comprehension, but their very unknowableness increased rather than lessened his regard for her.

"Why, I've a notion most folks make believe sometimes," he answered. "We're often sorry when we play we're glad; an' we pretend to be brave as lions when inside we're scart to death. I believe the Lord forgives actin', so long's we act somethin' good."

Abbie drew a breath of relief.

It was becoming vastly comforting to cast her worries on her husband's strong shoulders. He never became lost in labyrinths of moral speculation as she did. His vision was so large, so sane, his pathway one of so much broader charity, that as she leaned with ever increasing faith upon

his counsel she found her rigid ideals daily expanding into more elastic standards.

The joy growing out of their better understanding could not but be reflected in the home, which gradually slipped back into an atmosphere of rich contentment, every member of the household breathing a fresh harmony and rejoicing therein. A new impetus to please and to be pleased was in the air.

"Do you know," announced Captain Phineas one day, as if exploding a keg of gunpowder under the noses of his companions, "I've half a mind to buy a collar an' a necktie, an' go to church."

"Go to *where?*"

"To church. 'Twouldn't hurt me a mite. I could set there a spell well's anywhere else, I reckon. Abbie thinks a sight of church. I s'pose it would tickle her clean out of her skin to have me go."

There was a pause.

"I might go, too," Captain Jonas said thoughtfully. "As you say, 'twould please her to death. Besides, they'd likely have singin'. I guess I could stand it."

"But—but—goin' to church! Why, I'd feel

like—well, I don't know what!" objected Captain Benjamin.

"Now come, Benjamin, don't you go gettin' scared already," pleaded Captain Phineas. "Nobody'd ask you to sing a solo or preach the sermon. You could just slink in an' slink out again, an' likely nobody'd know you was there anyway."

"Don't you run away with no such idea, Phineas. Every soul in Wilton would be cranin' their necks—if only to ketch sight of us in our collars," was Captain Benjamin's reply. "I wouldn't blame 'em, either. I'd as soon think of seein' myself in a halo!"

"Well, what do you care? Can't you stand up to it for the sake of pleasin' Abbie?"

"I s'pose I could!" the Captain admitted grudgingly.

"Think of all she's done for you!"

"Y—e—s, I know it. Well, I'll go if the rest of you will."

"That's right!" Captain Phineas clapped the shoulder of the still but half-willing Benjamin. "Then it's settled. We'll buy collars an' neckties to-morrow, an' Sunday we'll give Abbie a grand surprise."

But in plotting this simple shock Captain Phineas had not laid plans for an earthquake!

On the Sunday when the Three Captains, wretched but glorious in Sabbath garb, followed Abbie and Zenas Henry into the square old-fashioned pew, Wilton was shaken from one end to the other. What a thrill ran through the congregation! How everyone leaned forward to see Captain Phineas erect in a boiled shirt; Captain Jonas corralled within the confines of a collar; and poor embarrassed Captain Benjamin struggling to appear unconscious of the tie that lassoed him so tightly! How the people whispered behind their hymn-books! Had the three sinners experienced a change of heart, they wondered.

And the Reverend Archibald Perkins—how astounded he was!

For twenty years he had led the Wilton people and long since had given up hope of ever beholding the vision that now greeted his eyes.

An earnest and faithful laborer in the vineyard was Mr. Perkins. His small and scattered parish, with its uncertain financial conditions, would have been discouraging enough but for the cheering fact that his deeply religious flock believed so implicitly in every word he uttered. Not one

of them ever thought of questioning his soundness or his doctrines. When he preached on the Fall of Jerusalem his description was so graphic that it seemed as if he must have been there; and Predestination and Everlasting Punishment were settled to such universal satisfaction that his congregation would as soon have objected to the rising of the sun as to have raised a conflicting opinion. His religion was a reality, and as it was linked with a vivid imagination there was nothing for which he failed to have a convincing and lucid explanation. Wilton paid him to expound the Good Book from cover to cover; therefore, like young Lochinvar:

"He stayed not for brake, and he stopped not for stone."

With absolute concreteness he brought every incident down to the unimaginative New England comprehension, and his people were entirely at rest as to the gospel they received in return for their money.

On this particular Sabbath he had prepared a careful and lengthy discourse on the journey of the Children of Israel through the Red Sea. It was one of the best sermons he had ever written, he thought, and he was eager to deliver it. But

"I'm so upset, Zenas Henry! The idea of Mr. Perkins setting up those three poor souls an' then —in the face an' eyes of the whole town—shooting off a cannon right at 'em. An' after they went to church just to please me, too! I do feel dreadfully! They didn't deserve it, either. Three kinder creatures never lived than those Three Captains! Maybe they ain't much on working just now; sometime they'll get stirred up to it—wait an' see if they don't! Anyhow, neither Mr. Perkins nor anybody else has a right to fire at folks when they ain't got the chance to run. Of course they're all cut up underneath but they care too much for us to let us see it. I shall have to say something to 'em about it—I can't let 'em think *I* side in with the scolding they got. An' I shall tell Mr. Perkins my opinion of that sermon, yes, I shall—if I die for it!"

Zenas Henry could scarcely believe his ears.

To take Mr. Perkins to task! No one in Wilton had ever thought of doing such a thing!

While Abbie sputtered on, a spot of scarlet on either cheek, she turned up the skirt of her black silk and buttoned on her bibbed apron. The Sunday dinner was always a cold one. Her scruples did not permit her to cook on the Sabbath. Be-

sides a chill meal seemed to harmonize with the frigid church and the walk home in the teeth of the biting east wind. She had never seen any reason why people should expect to be cheerful on Sunday.

But to-day she tossed tradition to the four corners of the earth, and recklessly poured milk into a kettle as the first preparation for a hot chowder. When it was ready she served it steaming, flanked on either side by her best company pickles and by a pyramid of toasted crackers. All day she made it her study to please. She abandoned her unfamiliar and awful black silk, although usually she wore it all day; she read aloud; she listened to Captain Phineas' story of the sea-serpent for the hundredth time and laughed more heartily than ever. All this she did, throwing into each act every whit of the charm with which Heaven had blessed her. And toward evening, remembering Captain Jonas' liking for music, she got out the singing-books and Zenas Henry's flute, and opened the melodeon.

Now if there was any one possession that Zenas Henry prized it was that melodeon! It had belonged to his mother and to his grandmother too, and although, perhaps, it might have been diffi-

cult to decide which was the more asthmatic—the flute or the melodeon—Zenas Henry himself saw no defects in either. With satisfaction he turned the spotted pages of the broad green singing-book until he found "Spare Us, Oh Lord." An austere old Puritan anthem it was! Not a selection to make light the heart, or comfort the despairing. Yet it was Zenas Henry's favorite—perhaps because it was the one whose myriad of trills he could best play on his wheezy flute; perhaps because its melody was enriched with memories of his boyhood, and he could still hear mingling in its harmonies echoes of voices that had long ago ceased to sing the old tune.

There he stood beside the melodeon waiting, and at the first chord his foot began to beat out the marked rhythm, and his flute caught up the air. As he played he gave a nod when Abbie was to come in, and with her shrill quaver carry the refrain; and there was another nod for the Three Captains to make their plunge into the abyss of the bass:

"Spare us, oh Lord, aloud we cr—y (*two*, *three*, *four*, went Zenas Henry's foot),
Nor let the s—u—n
Go d—o—w—n at noon!

Our years are one, our years are one eternal day,
Oh must (*two*, *three*)
Thy chil (*two*, *three*) dren die?
Our years are one eternal day,
Oh must Thy children die—so—soon?"

Although Captain Jonas loved to sing he would have preferred "When the Stormy Winds Do Blow" or "Come, My Beloved, Haste Away," for the minor chords with which the anthem ended left him with an overwhelming sense of loneliness. But he would not have marred Zenas Henry's pleasure by confessing how the mournful strains haunted him. Instead he sang lustily until the last rays of the sun, slanting through the twelve tiny window-panes, shot across the scarlet geraniums; across Abbie's softly parted hair; across the face of Zenas Henry. When the room had faded into shadow Abbie swung round on the creaking organ stool.

"I was so sorry about the sermon to-day," she began, hardly knowing how to proceed. "Of course I had no idea that Mr. Perkins would preach any such way as he did."

"It was a kind of a ranter, warn't it?" Captain Phineas replied. "It reminded me of a storm we

had off the Canary Islands once. That began gentle, too, but before long it had churned itself up into a smother of white caps. Try as I would I got to livin' that tempest all over again, an' thinkin' how we stood at the pumps twelve hours without a bite to eat! It took me so far away from Wilton that I lost track of what the minister was hollerin' an' thumpin' about, an' before I came to myself he was through!"

Captain Jonas laughed.

"I may's well confess," he said, "that I dozed off. But I woke up in time for the singin'."

"I can beat you all," declared Captain Benjamin. "Though my hearin' ain't what it used to be, I got the text! I lost most of the sermon but I did get that! *Go to the ant, thou Sluggard—consider her ways an' be wise.* I don't believe I'd 'a' got it so well if it hadn't been that the other two times I've been to church—once on the Maine coast, an' once in a little place in Connecticut where I used to live—the ministers hadn't happened to preach on that very thing. Ministers seem to like to preach 'bout that sluggard, somehow. Queer, with so many things to talk about, they should keep harpin' on him, ain't it?"

As Abbie drew a sigh of relief, under cover of

the dusk Zenas Henry caught her hand and whispered:

"You needn't have worried 'bout Mr. Perkins shootin' at the Three Captains! The cannon-balls went clean over 'em, thank the Lord, an' never even stirred a hair on their heads!"

CHAPTER IX

THE COMING OF DELIGHT

IT was in May that the great storm came. For days Zenas Henry's almanacs and Captain Benjamin's rheumatism had been foretelling it—a notable circumstance, since their predictions had never before been in accord. When, after struggling back from the village in the teeth of the gale Zenas Henry stepped into the warmth of the white cottage and with all his strength forced together the outside door, he called triumphantly:

"Well, that storm I've been tellin' you about is here, an' it'll be a rouser by night."

Abbie, who was sewing before the sitting-room fire, looked up and smiled.

What cared she for storms? There had been many a one in Wilton. Moreover was not her world bounded by the four walls of her home, and her cloud or sunshine in the face of the rugged

man looking down at her? Although sheets of rain welled over each other, flooding the window-panes; although rising winds shook the very house until it trembled, she stitched on—humming as she worked.

Beside her Captain Benjamin was quietly deciphering his newspaper, while in the corner the other two Captains wrestled at back-gammon.

Even the cat curled upon the braided rug slept unconcernedly.

Still panting, Zenas Henry came in—mopping the rain from his face with his big red handkerchief.

"So our storm's come, Zenas Henry!" Captain Benjamin said, glancing up over his spectacles. "I knew I never could feel's I do without something bein' on the way. You're promisin' us a bad one, eh?"

"'Bout the worst we've seen this year!" declared Zenas Henry.

"You don't say!" piped Captain Phineas. "I didn't know it was doin' much outside. I've been too busy tryin' to wallop Captain Jonas at these sheckers to keep my eye on the weather."

He cast a look over his shoulder toward the

window but being unable to see out, turned again to his game.

"It's my move, Jonas," he said. "I reckon I've got you this time."

With a chuckle he proceeded to pick off a row of red disks.

Captain Benjamin, however, threw down his paper and going to Zenas Henry's side, looked out toward the sea.

"My, but this is a rough one—no mistake!" he exclaimed. "I'd no idea it had blown up so since dinner. I don't know as I ever saw it any worse."

He lingered, gazing thoughtfully out into the storm.

A low bank of fog, drifting in from the ocean, was rapidly blotting out the churning, white-capped bay, and shrouding in mist the trees whose branches groped in the tempest with purposeless fury.

As they stood at the window a boy came into sight.

He was running at full speed and motioned to them.

"It's Silas Nickerson's boy," remarked Zenas Henry. "Look at him run! He must want to tear along like that in this wind. I had all I could

do to stand up in it. See! He wants somethin'! Likely there's mail at the store for us, though who'd be writin' is more'n I can tell."

Stepping quickly to the door, Zenas Henry opened it. A furious gust swept in, dashing piles of papers off the table and scattering them about the floor.

Above the tumult of the wind the boy's clear young voice carried distinctly:

"A big schooner's ashore on the Shoals!"

The backgammon board crashed to the carpet, sending checkers scurrying in every direction.

Without a word Captain Benjamin snatched up his sou'wester; Captain Phineas and Captain Jonas were inside their great coats; Abbie threw a shawl over her head; Zenas Henry buttoned up his oilskins. A second later they were fighting their way against the gale.

Breathless they reached the shore where little groups of villagers huddled in torrents of rain stood pointing excitedly out to sea.

Cleaving the upper edge of a ragged fold of fog, two masts of some unseen ship rocked violently. Now they dipped to one side and disappeared in the mist, only to rise, straighten, and

heel in the opposite direction. To and fro, to and fro they rolled ceaselessly.

"She's a big freighter bound South," called Silas Nickerson. "She struck 'bout noon—got into the fog most likely, an' lost her bearin's. This hurricane drove her fast on the Shoals. There ain't much hope for her, I'm afraid."

"Where's the life-savin' crew?" shouted Zenas Henry.

"Lower on the beach, in the shelter of the curve. They can't get a line out there in the face of this wind so they're tryin' to launch the boat. They've been at it over an hour but you can't keep a boat right side up in a sea like this."

Zenas Henry, who was too exhausted to bawl to Silas above the uproar, braced himself against the tempest while Abbie, scarcely able to keep her footing, clung to his arm. With pale faces they watched first the rolling masts, then the men who battled in the surf with the lifeboat.

Silent beside them stood the Three Captains.

No need to lift the curtain of mist that concealed the tragedy there in the open sea! But too vividly they could picture it.

The waves crashed up on the sand flinging high in air wreaths of spray which were caught by the

wind and tossed hither and thither. Rain beat down in sheets; the gale increased.

Meantime, redoubling their efforts, the men manning the lifeboat labored on. Again and again their stanch craft whirled like a cockleshell in the boiling foam, and turned keel uppermost. Then of a sudden, a shout rose from the crowd —the boat was beyond the breakers, and was reeling in the angry green waters as her crew fought to steady her course. A moment later she shot forward, disappearing in the silver veil of cloud.

Abbie sobbed hysterically and even Zenas Henry trembled with excitement.

So intent had they all been on the awful scene before them that no one had missed Captain Benjamin until a cry from Captain Phineas caused them to turn. Out of the midst of a clutter of lobster-pots, nets, and boats cumbering the inner shore, across the sand limped Captain Benjamin, dragging behind him his old yellow dory. He was very white, and his eyes glowed oddly with a half-crazed purpose in their depths.

Dashing forward, Zenas Henry caught his arm.

"What are you doin'? What are you doin'?" he shouted. "Are you mad?"

But without reply Captain Benjamin bore on

the clumsy boat as lightly as if it had been a toy.

Zenas Henry shook him by the shoulder.

"Where are you goin'?" he repeated.

A groan burst from the Captain's lips.

"I can't stand here an' watch those masts! I can't bear it! Remember I was pulled out of a sea like this myself. If somebody hadn't hauled me to shore I'd have been where the poor devils on that ship will be in another hour. Somebody's got to go to 'em!"

"But the boat has gone, man!"

Captain Benjamin wrenched himself free of Zenas Henry's hold, angry at being delayed.

"Can't you see that a big schooner like that must be carryin' a good-sized crew? Do you think they can all pile into one lifeboat? Why, they'd swamp her in no time! Before the boat can make a second trip it'll be too late. Don't hold me! Don't stop me! Maybe I can't make the ship, but I'm goin' to try!"

Captain Phineas leaped to seize the other end of the skiff:

"I'm with you, mate!" he cried. "We're the ones to go—we've no one to leave behind us. I reckon our lives are as well spent this way as any other."

Catching up the oars, Captain Jonas followed.

"You're right, lads! We'll take the chance together."

Abbie rushed to Zenas Henry.

"They mustn't go!" she protested violently. "They must not go, Zenas Henry! Why, that dory of theirs will be no more use in this sea than an eggshell. They are your friends, Zenas Henry —they will do as you say. Tell them not to go! Stop 'em, for God's sake!"

But Zenas Henry did not answer.

The Three Captains neared the water.

As they advanced the villagers parted mutely to let them pass. Had they really reached up into giants, these three men? Or was it only that transformed by the dignity of heroism they seemed to tower above their fellows? The transition of Villon the vagabond to Villon the poet was as slight a thing. Shamefacedly Wilton hung its head. It had been entertaining angels unaware—nay, more, gods!—and, like the dwellers of Sodom, had jeered, scoffed!

No one ventured to stay the three, mad as was their undertaking—no one but a solitary woman, who watched their progress with pallid face.

"It's terrible, Zenas Henry! They'll never

come back alive. You won't let 'em go. Stop 'em, oh, please stop 'em before it's too late!" she pleaded, laying her hand on his.

The hand she touched was so icy, so lifeless in her grasp, that she started back, glancing up fearfully—she knew not why—at her husband. What she saw in his face awed her into silence, gripping her heart until its beats almost ceased.

Such agony, such conflict, she had never seen in human face before.

What was the meaning of the struggle?

She did not understand, nor was there time now to solve it. Action was imperative. Already the Three Captains were at the edge of the surf. She must stir her husband out of this strange mood. Once more she sought his hand in the hope of bringing him to himself. But this time the fist was clenched, the eyes unseeing, the jaw set. Then of a sudden the significance of it all rushed upon her!

Springing before him, she seized his wrists in a desperate clasp.

"No! No!" she shrieked. "No, Zenas Henry! You cannot—you must not go! It is death! What are the men on that ship to you? I love you—love you!"

Wildly she placed both hands against his breast, holding him back with all her power. But Zenas Henry heard her not.

"There are men dyin' out there, trapped like rats," he cried sharply, "while I stand here with a pair of strong arms to pull a boat! Would you make a coward of me—you, that I've looked up to so? You'd oughter help me to be a man, not hinder me!"

The words rang cruelly.

Abbie drew nearer. Her form, caught by the wind, rested unsteadily against him. Zenas Henry's face whitened, then stiffened into sternness. Had the spirit of some Viking ancestor taken possession of him—some chief to whom conflict was life, and woman but a chattel? A savage courage, barbaric in its intensity, transfigured him. Tearing himself fiercely from her, he strode a few steps toward the boat; then he wheeled and came back. He caught her from the sand and kissed her roughly.

"You are more to me than anything in the world!" he moaned. "Remember that always—no matter what happens."

For an instant he held her closely; then set her upon her feet and was gone.

Mechanically Abbie dragged herself after him to the margin of the surf. She was dimly conscious of figures hurrying about; of Captain Benjamin giving her his big silver watch and kissing her hands; of a boat floating like a chip in the foam; of shouts from the crowd. Afterward the dory melted into the fog-bank.

It was indeed a merciful Heaven that dropped that film of mist between the shore and the open sea!

Withdrawing from the neighbors who would have pressed round her, Abbie sought the shelter of a fishing shack and sank down upon an overturned cask. An hour before, and her world had throbbed with joy; now the very heart pulsing it was gone. This love which had come so late into her life, for which she had waited and prayed—surely the Lord would not now snatch it from her! Yet how unworthy she was of a treasure so priceless! Who was she that Heaven should have placed within her keeping the happiness of men like these? And while she had been trying to shackle them in the chains of her petty creeds, and forcing them to conform to her pigmy ethics, their souls had been blossoming into a perfection that she might never hope to reach.

Humbly she bowed her head upon her hands and prayed.

Ah, it was well indeed that she was spared the sight of the four as, in the pitiless ocean, they fought for existence!

With the fiendishness of tormentors the great billows curled round them, now hanging savagely above their heads as if to leap upon the slender craft; now bullying the oarsmen into scaling their angry mountain-peaks of whiteness. From wave to wave the boat slipped, guided through the fog only by the dismal note of the bell-buoy anchored off the Shoals. Sometimes it was shut from the world by walls of gleaming water, as it slid into a trough between the billows; sometimes it rode high enough in the air for the men to catch shadowy glimpses of the unfortunate ship over which the waves broke so incessantly.

Nearer and nearer they came.

They could now distinguish dark specks in the rigging—moving, human specks, that clung there desperately.

Already the life-savers had reached the vessel and tossed beside her as they received their load. Then they put off. They could carry no more.

Spurred on by the ever narrowing distance be-

tween them and the ship, the four men bent to their oars with firmer stroke. There was now but a few yards to cover. Yet short as it was, the tempest, as if fearing to be cheated of its victims, cut more fiercely in their faces, balking their progress by blinding clouds of salt spray. Truly the furies of Æolus were unleashed!

The wreck stood out plainly now. Her bow—grounded on the bar—dipped forward, weighed down by the listing of a heavy cargo, while her stern, naked above the waves, rose and fell with every billow. As they listened they could catch the booming of the water surging over her, and hear the ghostly piping of the wind as it wailed through the rigging.

There was not a soul aboard—not one.

Yet stop!

What was that figure lashed to the mast—that immovable form that looked before it into the face of the gale?

Was it—could it be a man?

Surely man was never so motionless!

Zenas Henry cried out.

Whether he merely screamed hysterically, whether he called to the creature on the ship he could not have told.

Across the water the cry echoed weirdly.

The figure turned. It was a man, and from his shoulder a child raised its head.

"It's the captain of the ship!" yelled Zenas Henry. "Pull in nearer, mates—pull in close as you dare."

Again he hailed the man, who this time gave a faint cry in response.

From the bobbing dory they could see him unwinding the ropes which bound him to the mast, and carefully lifting the child in his arms. So tremendous was the sea that they dared not venture too close to the ship, lest they be dashed in fragments against her side.

"Watch your chance!" screamed Captain Benjamin, making a trumpet of his hands, "watch your chance, then toss the child! It is the only way."

Evidently the man on the wreck understood.

He waited, the child raised above his head.

Then the chance came.

During a lull of the wind the small boat, oh, so small against the towering grim hulk, swept alongside and Zenas Henry rose, bracing his feet as firmly as he was able, and extending his arms.

Suddenly, unerringly, a nondescript bundle

fluttered above the sea, then fell into his grasp with a force that made him reel. As he swayed to right himself, without warning a squall ripped across the ship. They heard a grating of her keel on the bar; a grinding of timber; a crash! The great mast snapped brittlely as the stem of a flower, and dropped across the vessel.

Although the force of its fall was broken as it splintered upon the deck, its tip sagged in the water and struck Zenas Henry who staggered with the child. Loosely she slipped from his hold into the bottom of the skiff and he pitched forward, his arms trailing in the surf. They dragged him back into the dory where he fell limply to the floor, the blood oozing from an ugly gash just above his temple.

At the same moment a shout came from the man on the ship.

The Three Captains looked up.

In that short interval the wreck had settled lower in the water and they could see her quiver helplessly as the torrents pounded down upon her.

"She's going!" called the man. "Stand off, or you'll be sucked under. Make for shore—lose no time. God bless you. I stay by my ship!"

None too soon came the warning.

A shudder rent the mammoth hull. She keeled upon her side. The waves rushed upon their prey, snarling like starved creatures as they dragged it in pieces, and swept over it. Although the Three Captains scanned the wreckage nowhere could they find trace of the man who, loyal to his trust, had so fearlessly gone down into the deep.

Sadly they turned their boat and began their fight for land. It was a tragic home-coming. How useless had been their struggle—how worse than useless! They had not succeeded in rescuing the captain of the schooner; the child was, perhaps, dead; they had wasted the life of their friend, and had brought to Abbie a sorrow never to be healed.

"My God!" groaned Captain Benjamin, as he glanced into Zenas Henry's drawn face. "If it had only been one of us! How shall we ever tell her?"

Dispirited they battled with the storm, missing their comrade's powerful oar. The wind was now at their backs, but a strong tide was running out and prevented their making headway. As they rowed the knell of the buoy tolling on the Shoals became less and less distinct, however, and they began to strain their ears for the harsh voice of the horn from the life-saving station—the only

signal to direct them to the shore. They caught it at last. On they toiled, following the sound as if it had been a beacon.

Captain Benjamin was far spent. Great cords stood out on his forehead, and he panted with every stroke.

Would they ever reach the land?

Alas! poor Abbie, watching every incoming wave, had asked herself that question over and over again!

When the lifeboat had been beached and she had rushed forward for tidings Captain Scudder, worn as he was, had tried to comfort her. Yes, her husband had reached the wreck and was now on his way back. But that was hours ago! Why did they not come? Were they still fighting their way to shore, strenuously but safely, or swamped by the onslaught of some mighty billow, were they never to return?

Oh, the agony of that waiting!

Alone on the outskirts of the crowd, she paced the sand.

Then an atom shot out from beneath the edge of the misty curtain—it was the yellow dory!

"One, two three!" She counted the figures.

"One, two three!" Again she counted.

Were her eyes so dim with tears that she could see but three figures pulling at the oars?

"One, two, three!"

There were but three!

Which was gone?

Surely not gentle Captain Benjamin; she could not spare him! Not Captain Phineas, whose blundering kindliness had bridged many a chasm. Not Captain Jonas, always so quick to appreciate whatever was done for him. She could not give up one life!

The boat came nearer.

No, there was Captain Benjamin in the bow; she knew him by the gay kerchief knotted around his throat. And Captain Phineas was there, too, in his faded blue coat. The man in the stern was Captain Jonas. Then it was—no—no—it could not be Zenas Henry who was missing!

Her breath broke from her in great sobs.

She rushed to the verge of the beach careless that the waves foamed about her knees. After her surged the crowd, but Captain Scudder and his men, waist-deep in surf, drove them back. As the boat rode closer on the in-rolling breakers, Captain Benjamin dropped forward upon his oars. The life-savers grappled with the dory,

steadied it, and hauled it dry on the sand; but not before Abbie Brewster had caught a glimpse of the still figures lying in the bottom. Quietly Captain Scudder gave his orders and willing hands obeyed him. The exhausted men were helped to the shelter of the station. Then from the boat two unconscious forms were lifted. Abbie made no moan. Wild-eyed she walked beside Captain Scudder bearing her share of weight, as, aided by some of the villagers, they carried Zenas Henry into the low building.

Once beneath its roof, there was plenty to be done, and after the misery of inaction employment was a great relief. She followed the directions of the Wilton doctor with perfect calmness, not allowing herself to despair. For hours they worked together over Zenas Henry. In the meantime Captain Benjamin had recovered consciousness and the other two Captains were resting comfortably, while in a room adjoining more physicians were trying every means to bring the child back to life.

But Abbie thought of no one but her husband. When, at last, everything possible had been done she hung over him—raising his rough hand in hers, and carrying it to her cheek and to her lips.

Until dusk she sat beside him. Still he lay motionless.

Then a voice from the next room broke the silence:

"Father! Where is my father?"

Slowly Zenas Henry opened his eyes.

"What is it?" he questioned vaguely. "Where am I? Oh, I—I—remember now. The child—is she safe?"

Again came the little voice:

"I want my father!"

Painfully Zenas Henry raised himself on his elbow.

"It is the child," he murmured. "I must go to her."

Gently Abbie tried to hold him back.

"You can see her when you are better, dear," she answered. "You've hurt yourself, Zenas Henry, and you must keep quiet now. I'll go."

But Zenas Henry struggled up with determination.

"I've got to be the one to tell her," he protested.

Swaying giddily, he rose to his feet. Abbie, who saw that argument was useless, threw a blanket around him and guided him to the next

room where, from an iron cot, two great anxious eyes framed in masses of wet curls stared up into their faces.

Zenas Henry went to the bed and, sitting upon the edge of it, took the hands of the little girl.

"My father?" she asked eagerly. "Is my father here?"

Something in Zenas Henry's face, in his hesitation, arrested her.

"You didn't save my father?" she persisted with disconcerting directness.

"Father's with his ship, dearie," whispered the man softly.

As he stooped and raised her from the pillow two slender arms clung around his neck, and the little creature burst into sobs. Zenas Henry stroked her hair clumsily, yet with such infinite tenderness that Abbie, who was nearby, marveled. Although tears stood in his own eyes he made no attempt to check the child's storm of grief. At last, too worn out to weep longer, she became quiet.

Then she spoke:

"Father always said that every brave captain sticks by his ship," she ventured unsteadily. "He

told me so again out there in the wind, and he said I must help him by being brave too."

Zenas Henry drew her closer.

"He'd want me to be brave now," she added piteously, "and I'll try to—but oh, I want my father so!"

The great man kissed her cheek.

"I know, dearie," he said gently. "It ain't easy bein' brave. You must just let me take ahold an' help you. I ain't got any little girl to love an' take care of."

The soft head nestled lower on his shoulder. For a long time she lay quite still.

"What do they call you, little one?" he asked at last.

"My name is Delight," answered the child.

CHAPTER X

A MIRACLE

THE few days following the wreck of the *Michleen*, Wilton talked of nothing else —the bravery of the life-saving crew; the marvelous courage of Zenas Henry and the Three Captains; the fate of the intrepid commander of the schooner; and, above all, the future of the child now housed beneath the Brewster roof.

"I'm sure I don't see what's goin' to become of her!" Martha Crocker remarked to Lyman Bearse. "Abbie an' Zenas Henry, of course, have bit off 'bout as much as they can chew already. It's common talk that Abbie hasn't had a new dress since she got married, an' folks think—mind, I don't say it's so—but folks *think* she's turnin' in her money to help support those Three Captains who've been stickin' there like barnacles on a rock."

"Abbie Brewster certain has the right to spend her money as she chooses," Lyman yawned with an exasperatingly comfortable indifference. "As for the Three Captains, the town has shifted the opinion it had of them. It 'pears they ain't the good-for-nothin's we'd all put 'em down to be, but they're just queer—like folks you read about in books who do things other folks can't; they're critters goin' by fits an' starts, kinder geniuses!"

"Well, it's all very well for a man to be a genius when he's doin' somethin' at it," snapped Aunt Martha. "But in between times, when he's settin' round waitin' for another jolt, it's almighty hard on the ones drudgin' for him! If those three men had taken a job years ago they'd have been better off—genius or no genius. I reckon, though, that nobody ever wanted 'em."

"Folks enough want 'em now," Lyman answered. "They can pick 'bout any job they've a mind to. Everybody's crazy to get 'em. The whole town's lost its head! Nothin's too good for 'em. The selectmen are goin' to ask 'em to speak down at the schoolhouse on Memorial Day; an' there's some talk goin' round 'bout puttin' up a drinkin' fountain front of the church, an' namin' it after them an' Zenas Henry. The Junction

folks ain't never had anything like this happen over there!" Lyman concluded, with local pride.

The inmates of the Brewster home arose, indeed, to find themselves knighted. They bore their honors meekly, however. Their experience in the storm was not such as left behind it a sense of human importance. Humbled rather than exalted by their strife with the tempest, they attributed their escape not to their own powers but to Providence alone. But the villagers had not witnessed the tragedy behind that leaden pall of mist, and could therefore discuss with glib tongues scenes which brought only shudders of horror to the chief actors.

So while excitement ran high and men cleared scattered wreckage from the beach, scanning eagerly every object cast up by the tide, while they shouted from fence to fence tales of the catastrophe, the heroes of the disaster kept well within the stronghold of the white cottage. Zenas Henry was much too shaken to risk being reminded of the agony through which he had passed, and as for Delight, they strove to shield her from further distress.

In the meantime she had recovered enough to be about, and the Brewsters had their first oppor-

tunity to make acquaintance with the tiny stranger whom they were sheltering. A slender, dark-eyed girl of ten she was, with a flavor of quaint matureness in her speech, and a reserve which mellowed into cordiality when, after deliberation, she at last bestowed her friendship on Abbie and the Three Captains.

But mere friendship was far too commonplace a tribute to offer to Zenas Henry. Was he not protector, hero, almost a deity? All the torrent of affection welling up in her passionate and lonely little heart she poured out upon him. This devotion, so appealing in its helplessness, touched a new chord in the gruff man's nature. Many a night after the child was asleep the cadence of her laughter echoed in his ears, and the remembered pressure of her clinging hand sent through him a thrill of joy he had never before known. How quiet it seemed when she was not about! And when, with the day, the stillness of the house was broken by the patter of wee brown feet that left on Abbie's neatly brushed floors long trails of sandy imprints, Zenas Henry realized for the first time that without this new element of untidiness the home had been incomplete. He knew now that far down in his soul he had yearned for that

very disorder—the careless tracks of small bare toes, the clutter of shells and pebbles, the confusion of pencils and bits of paper.

As the little one traveled in and out, from one room to another, he called after her a score of names which a fresh impulse prompted him to coin: Sand Dollars, Sea Urchin, Star Fish! For an instant the girl's laughing eyes would meet and hold his own, the roguish light in them softening; then the pattering feet would be off and away, their faint tread dying in the distance. As their echoes quieted into silence a sudden throb of gladness in the man's heart would be followed by a vague, fearful sadness; a dread of the future.

Abbie, less demonstrative than her husband, performed, in the meantime, every duty toward Delight with motherly care, treasuring each token of the child's dependence. There was something in her growing affection that terrified her. To have a child to care for! To brush out tangles of curls; to mend tiny garments; to feel the clasp of little arms, and moist good-night kisses! For all this her starving nature had cried out until the cry had deadened to the silence of resignation. She had tried to mother Zenas Henry and the forlorn wanderers who had strayed into her

home, but it had all been unsatisfying. Now behold her longings had been answered! Yet ere she surrendered to complete contentment there sounded a warning note, sad as the tones of a bell on a sunken reef. It was madness to unfetter her affection, since to give it rein could but bring future suffering. Delight would, of course, be claimed, and soon fade into an empty memory. She must not allow her feelings to take root in soil so unstable.

For Delight, however, the present held nothing but the promise of happiness. Gradually she was transformed from a grave into a smiling child. But before the smiles came there had been many sad hours—hours when she had slipped off alone to a deserted corner of the beach, and sobbed her heart out on the sand at the sea's margin. Amid the strange shifting of her environment one thing alone remained unchanged—the sea! To its mighty heart she instinctively came for comfort, and in its echoing sobs her own were stilled. Day by day the sympathy between herself and those about her strengthened; day by day she grew more firmly into the life of her new-found home.

For all unconscious of the webs of habit the members of the household had woven about them-

gettin' on his legs again in great shape," he remarked without introduction.

The scythe dropped from Zenas Henry's nerveless hand.

"Yes," went on Lyman, "he's settin' up an' commencin' to crawl round—wonderful, ain't it? He's leavin' town to-morrow."

Zenas Henry's heart gave a bound.

"'Pears he has folks in Virginia, an' he's goin' back there to ship with one of 'em on a coaster."

"You don't say!" Zenas Henry managed to stammer.

"Yes, he's off to-morrow mornin'—that is, if it don't rain. He told me to tell you he was comin' up to see you this afternoon," he added casually.

"Did he tell you what he wanted?"

Lyman shook his head.

"No, he didn't say a thing. Just mentioned somethin' about the little girl. Likely he's goin' to take her off your hands. You'd oughter be glad, too. Goodness knows you've got enough people to feed without havin' her!"

He leaned forward to brush a green fly from his horse's flank.

Zenas Henry regarded him fixedly, struggling —in the meantime—for some reply, but his words

were so tardy in coming that they were lost in the gritting of Lyman's wheels as he sped over the sandy road. As in a trance, Zenas Henry watched the wagon grow smaller and smaller and disappear into the dark, pine-shaded distance; and yet long after it was swallowed up he stood immovable, his eyes fastened unseeingly upon the spot where it had been lost among the trees.

Well, he had expected the blow!

This child, thrust so miraculously into his arms, had been an unreality too beautiful to endure.

And now the vision was to vanish forever!

Slowly he stooped to pick up the scythe lying at his feet. The strength to swing it was gone. Instead, he leaned upon the handle, shifting his gaze to the clear blue line severing sky from sea. For a long time he stood there looking straight before him. Then with an instinctive groping for comfort he turned, and dragged himself up the hill toward the house.

Abbie, who was alone on the porch picking over a bowl of currants, glanced up in surprise as he approached; then catching sight of his face she exclaimed quickly:

"What's the matter, Zenas Henry?"

"The mate of the *Michleen*'s coming up to see

us this afternoon," Zenas Henry announced without the pretense of delay.

She started.

"Did you see him?" was her eager question.

"No. Lyman told me."

"Did he say——?"

"No, but the fellow's comin' to take the child away with him—I'm certain of that."

Abbie did not reply.

The breeze stealing through the big linden before the door rustled the leaves overhead with an irritating playfulness, peculiarly at variance with the mood of the moment, while above the sweep of wind through the treetop could be heard the monotonous rhythm of distant breakers.

Suddenly Zenas Henry sank upon the steps and resting his arms on the doorpost, buried his face in them. Abbie had never before known him to give way—this great man who seemed incapable of weakness.

How she longed to comfort him!

But the battle he was fighting must be fought out single-handed; it was his way. And, after all, what word of cheer had she to offer? He was of too keen-sighted a nature to be buoyed up by mere words that failed to alter truths they sought

to gloss over. No amount of argument could be of use now. The facts remained. She might love and sympathize, but she could not shield him from living out the experiences of his own life.

And so she waited.

Of her own grief at losing Delight she did not allow herself to think. Never had the groping, unsatisfied longings of her heart been so nearly stilled as since the child had come into the home. And now that fleeting vision of motherhood was past! There would be no more journeys over the creaking stairs to put an extra blanket on the tiny white bed when the night winds swept in from the sea. A wave of desolation stole over her at the thought of the empty future. Yet was it empty? She still had the Three Captains and Zenas Henry—Zenas Henry who even now was wrestling in a Gethsemane of anguish far greater than hers. He needed her; she must not think of herself.

Softly she put her hand on his bowed head.

"Zenas Henry!" she whispered.

A tremor went over the man's great frame.

His head slipped lower until his face was hidden in her lap.

"I've dreaded this all along," he moaned, "an'

yet I didn't dream I cared so much. It would have been a sight easier to die for her out there in the storm, than to have to hand her over to somebody else now. If she was goin' to be happier p'raps I could brace myself to it; but I know no one'll ever begin to think as much of her as we do."

His voice trembled.

Abbie laid her hand on the rough brown ones clenched so tightly.

"I'm so sorry, Zenas Henry!" she said. "I wish I could help you. From the first I saw you were getting all wrapped up in the child, an' I've worried over what it would mean to you if we had to give her to her own folks. After all, dear, Delight don't belong to us. The Lord sent us a wonderful lot of sunshine for a while; we ought to be thankful for it, an' not go mournin' because we can't have it always."

"I know it," murmured Zenas Henry thickly.

"Remember it was kindness that sent her to us at all."

"Yes, yes—it was."

Slowly he raised his head and drew the back of his great tanned fist across his eyes.

"I'm ashamed of myself," he declared. "You're a good woman, Abbie. Don't go wor-

ryin' 'bout it any more. Look! There's the Three Captains comin' across the field. You tell 'em, won't you—I can't."

But the Three Captains needed not to be told, they read the message in Zenas Henry's forced cheerfulness, in Abbie's agitated face.

And no sooner was dinner finished, and Delight with pail and shovel on her way to the dunes, than the giant mate of the *Michleen* stepped across the threshold. The ravages of fever still hollowed his cheek, and showed in the thin hand and feeble step.

Instantly Zenas Henry's antagonism melted into sympathy.

He dragged forward a high-backed rocker.

"You've been pretty hard hit, mate," he said.

"Yes," panted the big fellow as he let his head sink into the cushion behind him. "I'll be better in a minute. The climb up the hill took my breath."

Zenas Henry nodded.

The rustling music of the linden outside the window stole into the silence, and the old clock on the shelf ticked noisily.

At last the mate spoke again:

"I'm leaving Wilton to-morrow," he said. "I

couldn't go, though, without coming to see you all first. It ain't every day you can get sight of four brave men. Besides, I want to thank you for what you've done for the child."

Zenas Henry raised a hand to stay him.

"All you've done ain't been lost on us men," went on the Swede. "It's no use trying to pay for that sort of thing, and none of you would take money if it was offered you; but we'll never forget it—never. Captain Hathaway, sir, was the finest captain afloat," he added with touching simplicity.

No sound came from Zenas Henry's dry lips but the stranger was happily unconscious of the tensity of his audience.

"When I take Delight away with me in the morning——"

With startling abruptness Zenas Henry cut him short:

"Where are you goin' to take her?" he demanded sharply.

"Take the child?" repeated the sailor, disconcerted by the sudden question. "Oh, I'm going back to Virginia."

"Are her folks there?"

"Her folks? No. She ain't got any folks—

no one in the world. Captain Hathaway told me so himself. He ran away to sea when he was a lad and cut loose from all his people. His wife died when the little one was born, and her family are dead too."

"An' the girl?" Zenas Henry asked breathlessly.

"I shall take her home with me. I ain't going to leave no daughter of Captain Hathaway's knocking round the world—not if I know it! To be sure I've a wife and four babies of my own so I can't promise to do much for her, but I think a lot of her, and for her father's sake I'll bargain to share what I have with her long's I live."

With every nerve keyed Zenas Henry bent forward.

"Mate," he began, "suppose there were other folks willin' to take that child an' do for her all her life."

The stranger shook his head. It was evident that the interview was tiring him and that he was eager to cut it short. Shadows had deepened beneath his eyes, and his voice had become weak and husky.

"It's generous of you, Mr. Brewster, but there ain't call for anyone in this town to take Delight

just because the ocean happened to cast her up here. I'm glad to take her home, and do as much for her as I do for my own children."

"You're a loyal man, mate!" broke out Zenas Henry, "but you don't seem to ketch what I'm drivin' at. S'pose there were folks who thought as much of that child as you do—folks who'd love her an' take care of her like as if she was their own."

His tones quivered.

Rising he stood confronting the mighty seaman, a terrible earnestness in his face.

"I tell you what, mate, we've come to think a sight of that little girl. I ain't takin' her in pity, an' I ain't beggin' no favors. The child is ours. We've been through hell to save her life, an' I reckon she belongs to us!"

"An' if you're worryin' 'bout whether we can take care of her or not," put in Captain Phineas, "I don't mind tellin' you that the three of us are goin' to take a job with the fishin' fleet, an' if we can't give her what she wants we'll go drown ourselves."

At last the call to action had sounded!

Over the heads of the Three Captains Abbie's eyes met Zenas Henry's. Persistently she had be-

lieved that some day the note would echo; but the town, still skeptical and merciless in its unrelenting theology, had awaited a thunderbolt—some heaven-directed fury, mighty with rebuke, that should bring these sluggards face to face with the wrath of their Creator. Surely, the village argued, a just God would demand an accounting for years of idleness; for the wasting of lives which might have been powers for good. Patiently Wilton bided its time, tarrying hungrily to witness the vengeance when it should descend.

And now, behold, Jehovah came, bringing life's meaning to these three purposeless creatures, and His power lay neither in fire nor in the sword—only in the hand of a little child!

A stillness fell upon the room.

Then, dragging himself slowly to his feet, the gaunt Swede thrust his palm into Zenas Henry's.

Although he knew it not a miracle had been wrought, and within the walls of that humble cottage his eyes had beheld the majesty of the Lord.

CHAPTER XI

CAPTAIN PHINEAS' CAREER AND HOW IT ENDED

"SO you're goin' out with the fishin' fleet, are you?" Zenas Henry observed to Captain Phineas the next morning, as the two sat in the shade of the grapevine that covered the shed door.

The Captain hesitated, his eyes indolently following the little creek that crept like a serpent into the hiding of the tall marsh grass.

"Well, no. I—I—ain't!" he answered after an awkward pause. "The fact is, I've been thinkin' it all over, Zenas Henry, an' I've come to the conclusion that I ain't no fisherman. Everyone ain't born to fish! The Lord makes good fishermen, same's He makes good mothers, an' good school-teachers. You can't for the life of you put your finger on the difference between the real

ones, an' the others—but there is an almighty one!"

He paused.

"Now when I go fishin' with folks I always start out as cocksure of good luck as they are. I smash my clam on the side of the boat with a whang, I put on my bait, I throw my line over! But I'm always the one gets my finger cut on the clam-shell; that gets my bait stole; that gets my line snagged. If I do hook a cod I'm certain as daylight to lose him gettin' him into the boat. Generally speakin', though, I don't get nothin' unless I jig somethin' through the gills, or haul in a dogfish or a sculpin. No, I ain't no fisherman —that's sure!"

As if accepting Fate's decree with contentment, the Captain sighed deeply.

But not as deeply as did Zenas Henry.

This, then, was the end of the good resolutions made the evening before—a flash in the pan, that was all!

"I might have known it," muttered Zenas Henry to himself.

"No," repeated Captain Phineas, with cheery resignation, "no, I ain't a born fisherman. I've just got to face the truth."

For an interval he drew in the fumes of his cob pipe, then added mysteriously:

"So, long's I ain't, I'm figgerin' on doin' somethin' else."

He rose, and from behind a pile of barrels dragged forth a rough board which he proudly turned toward Zenas Henry. Zenas Henry glanced at it sharply. On it were two lines of lettering scrawled in black paint, and after no little difficulty he slowly deciphered the inscription:

CAPTAIN PHINEAS TAYLOR
CARPENTER

"Carpenter? Carpenter?" ejaculated Zenas Henry incredulously.

"Why not carpenter?" Captain Phineas demanded.

"But for the land's sake what—what in time set you to thinkin' of bein' a carpenter? What you got to be a carpenter *with?*"

"Well, I've got a tack-lifter—got it last spring to help Abbie take up carpets; it makes my knees ache every time I look at it, too. An' I've got your hammer, or I did have it somewheres if I ain't

mislaid it. That's 'bout all that's needed, I reckon. Carpenterin' is either puttin' nails in, an' buildin' things up; or haulin' nails out, an' takin' 'em down, ain't it?"

Zenas Henry gasped.

"An' you mean to say"—he pointed to the painted sign—"that you're goin' ahead to stick that shingle up somewheres?"

"Why not?"

"Well," drawled Zenas Henry dryly, "you might get a job!"

"S'posen I did?" Captain Phineas' good nature failed to desert him even under Zenas Henry's obvious scorn. "What if I did get a job? I don't hammer my finger more'n every third time."

Zenas Henry collapsed into silence, and realizing that the deep puffs at his pipe portended no more conversation, the newly-created carpenter, clasping the sign in his arms, moved off toward the front fence. From under the grape trellis Zenas Henry could see him wrestling in the wind and mopping his brow, but he offered no aid. At a very rakish slant which reflected no credit upon the skill of the artisan, the board was affixed to the gate-post and Captain Phineas ambled back up the hill.

Two of his fingers were wrapped in his red handkerchief and one of his knuckles was bleeding, but he beamed with satisfaction.

"It's up!" he announced.

Zenas Henry sniffed.

"Whatever set you goin' on carpenterin' beats me!" said he. "You'll make 'bout as good carpenter as a lobster would make dentist."

Captain Phineas grinned.

"I can try it, can't I?" he argued.

"Oh, you can try it. But just you wait till you get a good big chore on your hands! Somebody may send for you—have you reckoned on that—some of the summer folks, who don't know you?"

"They're the ones I'm layin' for!" answered Captain Phineas, with frankness.

"They're the only ones who'd be fooled into wantin' you," was the acid retort.

But even the Captain, sanguine as he was, was unprepared to have a motor-car roll up to the door that very noon and leave an order that the new carpenter call at Professor Farwell's at three o'clock to see about some work.

With concealed triumph, Captain Phineas promised to be there promptly.

And who were the Farwells?

Ah, no one in Wilton needed to ask that!

Had not old grandfather Nathan Frost been a Wilton fisherman? And had not his son, Nathan Junior, grown up in the house on the Point? A mischievous lad was Nathan Junior, a sore trial to his parents. Many of the Wilton Fathers could, to this day, spin yarns of his pranks! And when, wearied out by apologizing for his son's misconduct, Nathan Senior had shipped him to a western lumber camp, how the Wilton Fathers shook their heads; and what a dark end they predicted for Nathan Junior! But with his customary disregard for the corncob council which had consigned him to a life of penal servitude, Nathan Junior, one summer's day, returned to Wilton—returned successful, and not a prodigal as the town had decreed.

"They say Nathan Junior's rich as a Turk!" exclaimed Aunt Martha Crocker. "Think of it—him who never had a cent, an' owed everybody in town! I reckon he'll do some laughin' in his sleeve at the folks who called him a rollin' stone. He's gathered his moss a good sight better than some of those who were stretchin' their necks to see him keep on rollin'!"

Aunt Martha's remark was true enough!

Furthermore, Nathan Junior continued his detours from the path mapped out for him, by introducing a wife of remarkable beauty. The weary Wilton Fathers panted in their attempts to follow these cross-country trails of Fate! Nathan Junior did not remain in Wilton, you may be sure. He stayed just long enough to good-humoredly display his prosperity, and to erect a library which he named for that particular Wilton Father who had most loudly predicted his ultimate ruin—all of which proves that the sense of humor so keen in Nathan Junior's boyhood did not desert his maturer years!

After his departure, frequent rumors reached the villagers regarding Nathan Junior's career. He had rolled up a fortune by inventing some sort of hydraulic contrivance concerning which the Town Fathers were forced to scratch their heads. All this did not matter, however. But when, years afterward, a woman named Mrs. Farwell, proclaiming herself to be Nathan Junior's daughter, came to the village to build a summer residence, it mattered very much indeed. Accompanying her was her husband, whom gossip declared was a professor in some University near Boston; and who, if

given a heterogeneous lot of fins, wings, gills, and feathers, could construct for you any sort of animal you might name. The couple had with them a boy of ten, horses, motor-cars, and servants.

They put up at the Junction Hotel and Professor and Mrs. Farwell came at once to Wilton where they bought the knoll opposite Zenas Henry, and began the construction of a house the like of which the townspeople, and even the lofty Junction folks, had never before seen. It was a colonial mansion—a mansion with a pergola, an Italian garden, tennis courts, and broad verandas looking out to sea; a mansion, as Silas Nickerson avowed, with slippery floors everywhere, and ever so many big white china tubs that you could *fill with water an' waller in!*

Wilton received a liberal education while that house was building!

And it was at this mansion that Captain Phineas Taylor, Carpenter, was now commanded to appear!

He was not without trepidation nor was his wavering courage strengthened when, as he set forth, Zenas Henry bawled after him:

"Now you be careful what you do, Phineas Taylor. Mrs. Farwell has been a good neighbor

losophy? Certainly not Mrs. Farwell, imbued as she was with Nathan Junior's sense of humor.

"You see," went on the Captain, giving his accuser no opportunity for speech, "as I was comin' along Seth Eldridge hailed me. He's bought a new automobile, Seth has, an' so he's busy buildin' a sort of little cottage to keep it in. He had the roof most shingled when to-day he noticed it was breezin' up to rain; so he sung out to me to come in an' help him finish the job. If that machine should get wet it would mean a sight of loss to Seth, an' I just says to myself: Mis' Farwell ain't the woman to stand by an' see a man's fortune soaked up by a flood. She'd want me to duff right in an' help Seth. You would, wouldn't you now?"

Confronted by her own virtue Mrs. Farwell was forced to live up to it. She nodded.

"I knew it!" declared Captain Phineas. "That's exactly what I told Seth. So there I stayed till we'd made the roof so tight that the rain can pour down any time now, an' that automobile will be cosy as Jonah was inside the whale. Now, Mis' Farwell"—the Captain plunged boldly in—"what was it you were wantin' me to do?"

"Do? Oh, yes, I'll tell you about it. Mr.

Bearse, as you know, has gone over to Davisport to build a house; he's to be gone a month or more, so I sent for you. Will you come inside?"

Captain Phineas, skating awkwardly over the polished floors, followed her into the kitchen.

"My cook tells me," Mrs. Farwell said, "that there is a rustling behind the boards in the pantry. Perhaps, while the house has been closed during the winter a squirrel may have made a nest there. At any rate we want the boards taken off so we may see what the trouble is."

Captain Phineas drew a sigh of relief.

It was a case for the tack-lifter!

But what mystery lurked behind those boards?

Suppose—alas, it was not the slightest use to suppose! There stood Mrs. Farwell at his elbow, waiting.

He undid his stock in trade, wrapped so carefully in the faded red handkerchief.

"I brought only a few tools with me," he observed, with the air of one who had chest after chest of other implements at home, "'cause I didn't know 'xactly what I would need. But luckily I seem to have just the right thing at hand."

With mighty tugs he attacked the sheathing.

The nails had been driven far in and furthermore had rusted. With all his strength he pulled. At last a board gave way—then another! Whatever the horror was, it would soon be revealed. One more wrench, and the last board was off.

Timidly he peered into the dark hole.

"It's a rat's nest!" he cried with relief. "The nicest little round nest you ever saw, all lined warm as toast with rags! Want to look at it? It's just as cunnin' as can be. Seems an awful pity to disturb it. Wouldn't you just like to leave it here, now that you know what it is?"

The Captain, like my Uncle Toby, could not bear to hurt a hair on the head of a fly.

"No, indeed. Why, I couldn't leave a rat's nest in my house," replied the practical Mrs. Farwell.

"I s'pose not, marm. No, I s'pose you couldn't." The Captain shook his head. "You think you must take it out, do you?"

"Certainly!"

"Yes, I reckon so. 'Twould be a bad thing to leave. You're—you're sure you want it out?"

"Of course."

Still Captain Phineas hung back.

"You ain't likely to change your mind about it?"

"No," was the firm response.

"Well, here goes, then! But it does seem somethin' awful to go breakin' up a happy home like this! Poor little critters. What'll they do when they come back an' find it gone?"

Then a pleasing thought suddenly lightened his regret.

"Maybe they'll build another nest right in the same place!" he exclaimed. "They often do."

But Mrs. Farwell mistook the tenor of his suggestion.

"Oh, we can't have them doing that! I'm glad you spoke of it. Don't you know anything that will prevent their coming back?"

"I cal'ate broken glass would fix it so'st there'd be nothin' to tempt 'em to settle down there again," confessed Captain Phineas, unwillingly.

"An excellent idea! Put some about by all means. Mary! Break up some of those empty bottles in the cellar and bring to Captain Taylor."

The glass was brought.

As if scattering flowers on the graves of the departed the Captain reluctantly strewed the fragments about and renailed the sheathing.

"Was that all for to-day, marm?" he asked.

He was still rather solemn, the thought of the late devastation hanging over him like the memory of a crime.

"No. The other work, however, is in the garden. If you will come out, I will explain to you what I want done."

A wrinkle of anxiety puckered the Captain's brow. What was coming next?

"Well, at least," he reflected as he walked down the box-bordered path behind Mrs. Farwell, "I warn't struck abeam by that! I might have been a carpenter all my days for all she knew." He examined his hands critically. "I did get some splinters in my thumb, an' likely I'll lose the nail on that middle finger—the hammer came down on it with a fearful bang. But such things don't count for nothin'—I expected 'em!"

They had now reached the center of the garden where, buried deep in honeysuckle, stood a large summer-house. Mrs. Farwell halted before it.

"I've been thinking for some time," said she, "that if this tea-house stood on that little rise in the corner we should get a broader view of the ocean. There would be more breeze, too."

"So there would, marm! So there would!" assented Captain Phineas cordially.

"That is what I've told my husband," nodded Mrs. Farwell. "So, since you agree with me that it is better to have it moved, I am going to let you move it."

The Captain caught his breath.

Had she decreed that he transport Highland Light to Central Park he could not have been more aghast. And she spoke as if he had but to take the peaked tip of the pagoda between his thumb and forefinger, and set it down in the desired spot —an Arabian Nights' feat, truly, and he, alas, the Aladdin!

"So you were thinkin' of havin' it put over there!" he repeated, pointing to the distant group of mulberry trees.

"Yes."

"Over in that corner!"

"Yes."

"Humph!"

There was disconcerting significance in the monosyllable.

"Why not?"

"Oh, no reason in the world, marm—none that I know of. If you wanted it changed onto

Monomoy you should have it there," was the gallant response. "I was only thinkin' how queer it was you should have hit on just that spot."

"Isn't it a good place?"

"I reckon the place is well enough," mused the Captain. "But how strange things come round sometimes!"

Mrs. Farwell waited, but as Captain Phineas volunteered nothing further she persisted:

"What is the matter with that grove of mulberry trees?"

"Nothin' much. I was just s'prised at your lightin' on that corner for your summer-house 'cause it is the identical spot where I saw the adders fightin' yesterday."

"Adders!"

"Yes. There were two of 'em pitchin' into each other in great shape. You never saw such a set-to! The *Monitor-Merrimac* fight warn't no sort of a scrimmage compared to it!"

"Adders!" repeated Mrs. Farwell, gathering her skirts about her and stepping up on an elevated bit of the rockery. "What—what became of them?"

"Oh, I don't know, marm," responded the Captain with unconcern. "I went home to dinner."

"And left them fighting?"

"Yes, marm."

"But I didn't know there were adders about here."

Plainly the lady was disquieted.

"You didn't? My land, yes! There's scores of 'em! Why this place used to be called *Adder Farm* 'fore you bought it."

This historic data failed to call forth the interest Captain Phineas had expected.

"But they do not really hurt anyone, do they?" questioned Mrs. Farwell at last. "You never heard of anyone being bitten by an adder, did you?"

"Let me see—bit by an adder—bit by an adder!" the historian ruminated in the dusty corners of his memory. "Yes," he continued slowly, "there was a man by the name of Wilkinson, back in the seventies, who was bit by an adder."

"What became of him?" demanded Mrs. Farwell uneasily. "Did it kill him?"

"Oh, he drank some adder-root tea! That's famous stuff. Adder-root grows along by the brooks, you know. You get some, an' dry it up in the attic, an' then when you're bit you take an' steep it a couple of hours, an' make it into tea.

After the tea's cooled 'bout an hour you drink it," concluded Captain Phineas.

"Was that what the Wilkinson man did?"

"Yes, marm."

"So he didn't die after all?"

"Well—well—yes—he did!" admitted Captain Phineas reluctantly. "'Twas this way: he made the tea an' drank it—slick as a whistle, an' it would have cured him all right, too, if he hadn't ketched somethin' else; blood-poison, I think the doctor called it. Goodness knows where he got that! But anyway he did, an' it was the blood-poison that killed him."

"Perhaps if he'd taken the adder-root tea sooner——" suggested Mrs. Farwell, turning aside her head.

"He took it quick's he could get round to it. We don't do things down here fast's you do 'em in the city. I believe we live longer for it, too."

"He didn't."

"N—o!"

There was a silence.

"Do you know," Mrs. Farwell said thoughtfully, breaking the long pause, "I think I won't have that tea-house moved after all. The more I consider it the more foolish it seems to disturb it.

It is much more convenient where it now stands, and I believe it would be wiser to leave it there. What do you say?"

"I think it would be a sight wiser!"

The opinion came from the Captain's heart.

"Of course I shall pay you just the same. I——"

"No, marm—no, indeed! I couldn't take a cent!" interrupted Captain Phineas.

"But I insist. Your judgment is worth something; besides, I have taken a great deal of your valuable time."

"My *time!*"

"Yes. Your time is worth money, of course."

As with difficulty Captain Phineas checked the retort that it never had been, Mrs. Farwell drew from her purse a crisp bill which she forced into his hand with a finality that rendered refusal impossible.

The Captain touched it in a dazed sort of way. Money! His money! Money he had earned! Money which would buy real things for the child at home! It seemed incredible!

Squaring his shoulders with a new dignity as this novel measure of his value dawned upon him, Captain Phineas set out toward home.

lieved it if I hadn't witnessed it with my own eyes."

Without a doubt they went, and it was a blistered, sorry set of hands they brought back with them after hours at hauling bluefish. But they pluckily kept their discomfiture to themselves, and at the end of the week proudly poured their first wages into Abbie's lap. A prompt conference followed as to what should be done with the money.

Delight having now become a joint charge, a horde of obligations rose with the new relation. First, she must have clothes.

That clear June afternoon was never to be forgotten when the entire Brewster family bundled into the broad-seated wagon and rattled to the Junction shopping. Oh, the yards of cambric and dainty edging, the quantities of gingham they bought; the silk gown that Captain Benjamin wished to buy; the gaudy red and yellow plaid that Captain Jonas did buy—sneaking off by himself lest his extravagance be discouraged! The shoes and stockings they purchased! And the tiny slippers which Zenas Henry insisted upon adding, how elfin they were! Then there was the little white bed; and the rolls of wall paper abloom with roses, which Captain Phineas selected, and

which Lyman Bearse had promised to come and put on some evening when he was not busy.

Had there ever been pleasure such as this?

In consequence the Three Captains fished more earnestly the next week, and the smart of their lacerated fingers lessened wonderfully. Captain Phineas's enthusiasm even soared to such heights that he proposed they all give up their pipes and turn their tobacco money into ribbons and laces; but this sacrifice Abbie refused to permit.

Under Lyman's hand, in the meantime, the small room at the head of the stairs became a bower of blossoms; and with the aid of numberless cans of paint, Zenas Henry transformed the worn bureau and chairs into marvels of whiteness.

Abbie, whose work-basket was heaped with wee unfinished garments, now found no time to be annoyed by sandy floors or rooms that were not picked up, but from morning to night sang softly as she ran tucks and ruffles with deft needle. There had been a day, she admitted to herself, when the spiritual rather than the physical well-being of the child would have been her first care; but that day had long since passed. She had become very humble about her theology—reticent,

even—and strangely loth to dictate her dogmas to others.

The only creed Delight possessed was as simple as Zenas Henry's own—that there were precious few folks who wouldn't be saved. Wilton termed it a dangerous doctrine, and once Abbie herself would have considered it so; but not now. Perhaps it was because the faith beneath the belief was so sincere that she had not the heart to attempt to alter it. Strangely enough, therefore, it was the intellectual rather than the moral problem that proved most difficult for the child's guardians.

Delight's education, they soon learned, consisted of a collection of facts conglomerate and heterogeneous as the contents of a grab-bag. Although she had a thorough knowledge of the coast from Halifax to Florida, although she could box the compass with a celerity that might have done honor to an old salt, she was as innocent of spelling and arithmetic as one of Maeterlinck's *unborn souls*. By leagues she surpassed children of her own age in some subjects, only to be far out-distanced by them in others.

"If we could snip off—well, say half of what she knows 'bout the Gulf Stream, for instance, an'

hitch it onto what she knows 'bout figgers she'd fetch up mighty near right," asserted Captain Benjamin.

Undoubtedly, for the present, the girl was no candidate for the town school.

"We've just got to teach her ourselves," Zenas Henry said, "till we can get her to the point of joinin' in with children of her own age."

Accordingly another trip was made to the Junction and a small blackboard, a spelling book, reader, and arithmetic augmented the child's rapidly accumulating outfit. Then an educational congress took place!

"Captain Benjamin better take the readin'," decided Zenas Henry. "He reads mor'n the rest of us. Most every evenin' he's the one has the paper."

"Half the time he's asleep behind it," put in Captain Phineas.

"I ain't either!" was the tart protest from Captain Benjamin. "An', anyway, if I am, you can't say much. There's been times when you couldn't keep your own eyes open."

Captain Phineas did not press his defense.

"The writin' an' spellin' I think I'll take myself," went on Zenas Henry. "I'd kinder like to

brush up on some of those words with ei in 'em; not that I see it makes the flip of a cod's tail of difference which letter you put first. Still, you feel more in it with other folks if you set the letters down in the same order's they do. I'm certainly the one to take the writin' 'cause my hands ain't all cut up with trawlin'."

There was a general nod of assent.

"Now, I reckon we'd better turn both Captain Jonas an' Captain Phineas loose on the arithmetic. Two sets of brains are better'n one, an' between 'em they'd oughter hit it right once in a while," he concluded.

"Once in a while!" retorted Captain Phineas scornfully. "We can hit it right every time, Zenas Henry. Ain't we got the book?"

"Yes, you've got the book right 'nough," drawled Zenas Henry, "but, as I figger from soundin' it, it ain't goin' to be a beacon of light to them as sit in darkness. The man who wrote it may have known what the answers to his questions was, but if he did, he kep' 'em to himself."

"Do you mean to say there ain't any answers set down?"

"'Course there ain't! What good would it be to give a child a book with the answers all lined

up in the back of it? No, there ain't a bloomin' answer. It's likely, though, if you got stuck you could drop a line to the man," suggested Zenas Henry. "He must have left his address in the book somewheres."

"Well, who ever heard of such a way to write an arithmetic!" Captain Phineas broke out. "Why, I could get up a set of sums if I didn't have 'em to answer. Anybody could! Dollars to doughnuts the feller couldn't do 'em himself! Listen to this, now:

" 'If a bottle an' a cork cost sixty cents, an' the cork cost one-sixth as much as the bottle, what did the cork cost?' "

"Pooh! That ain't hard! Nobody needs to worry their head 'bout that," cried Captain Jonas derisively. "The cork cost a sixth of the bottle—ten cents; an' of course the bottle cost sixty cents."

"No, no, Captain Jonas," Captain Phineas contradicted, shaking his head sagely. "No, indeed! Why, it says right here that both of 'em together cost sixty cents."

"But they couldn't, don't you see!"

Settling back in his chair as if he had closed the incident forever, Captain Jonas began to whistle "Nancy Lee."

Captain Benjamin, on the contrary, waxed uneasy and, rising, began to pace the room—his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the toes of his boots.

Zenas Henry scratched his head.

"It does say they cost sixty cents all together," he ventured, after studying the book carefully.

"No matter 'bout that," was Captain Jonas's comfortable response. "Listen to me, now. If a bottle an' a cork cost sixty cents, an' the cork cost a sixth as much as the bottle, wouldn't the cork have to cost ten cents? Course 'twould! Ten is a sixth of sixty, ain't it?"

"But don't you see," began Captain Phineas eagerly, "that then you'd have the bottle costin' sixty cents, an' the cork costin' ten cents!"

"Well, what of it?"

Captain Jonas smiled a satisfied smile.

"That would make 'em both cost seventy cents all together!" argued Captain Phineas triumphantly.

"That's all right, ain't it? Seventy cents ain't goin' to break anybody, is it?" Captain Jonas glanced from one to another, a challenge in his eye.

"But the man didn't have but sixty cents in the

beginnin'," put in Zenas Henry, plainly unconvinced.

"Oh, law! Of course he did!" answered Captain Jonas. "Just you imagine a man settin' out to buy anything with only sixty cents in his pocket, an' blowin' in every darn copper of it on a bottle an' a cork! Where was he goin' to get his tobacco? Don't you fret! He warn't tellin' right out in the arithmetic how much money he had. He had some more tucked away in his hip pocket, of course, an' he took out ten cents of it an' paid for that cork when he found the man was goin' to charge him for it. You wouldn't have him turn round an' go sloppin' along a bottle without any cork in it, would you? But where he made his mistake," Captain Jonas shook his finger impressively at his audience, "where he made his mistake, I say, was not askin' 'bout that cork in the beginnin'! Now there ain't a mite of need for Delight to go fussin' with these numbers. All she's got to learn from this sum is that when she sets out to buy a bottle she must find out first whether the cork goes with it or not."

His hearers greeted this wisdom with approval.

"I will say," agreed Captain Phineas, "it was a

shabby trick to stick the feller for that cork. Poor man! Like's not the thought never entered his head! It just proves there's tricks in all trades, sure as 'lection!"

CHAPTER XIII

CAPTAIN PHINEAS HAS AN INSPIRATION

"I'VE some more stamps for you, Lyman," called Silas Nickerson to Mr. Bearse from the tiny window of the post-office; "a dozen or two, I reckon. How many have you got now?"

"'Bout a hundred and fifty! I'm creepin' up! I have to get a thousand before I can sell 'em."

"What on earth do you s'pose the folks that buys 'em want 'em for—old canceled stamps! It beats me!"

"Me, too," agreed Lyman. "But long's there are fools that'll pay good money for 'em, I don't see why I shouldn't take it. Besides, you get interested scrapin' 'em together—you can't help it somehow."

"I dare say. I've read that after a while you get well-nigh crazy collectin' 'bout anything. Now,

there's Abbie Brewster—she's took to collectin' *folks!* She's got three men an' a child so far, an' goodness knows who she'll pick up next." Silas grinned. "Likely it's good as collectin' stamps or old chinaware."

Lyman, who was wandering about the room reading the notices pinned on the walls, laughed.

"At least collectin' stamps doesn't cost anything," he remarked. "Now, Abbie's collectin' ain't so cheap. Still, I figger the Brewsters are gettin' along all right, don't you? The Three Captains are turnin' in good money, an' both she an' Zenas Henry have somethin'."

"I don't just know how they are makin' out," answered Silas, "but you can be mortal sure there ain't wads of greenbacks lyin' round loose up there. Feedin' six is a different proposition from feedin' two!"

No one realized the irony of this axiom better than Abbie and Zenas Henry themselves. Many a night when the cottage was hushed they sat under the lamp adding and re-adding columns of figures. As both had been left what the town termed "comfortable" neither had ever before known rigid economy.

"I'd rather cut a corner or two an' go on as we

are, keepin' Delight an' the Three Captains with us—wouldn't you?" questioned Zenas Henry anxiously.

"Indeed I would!" was the hearty response. "Why, I wouldn't have the Three Captains know for the world what a tight fit the money is."

"You'd really rather have 'em here?" persisted her husband. "You think it is worth it?"

"Worth it!"

A load seemed to slip from Zenas Henry's shoulders.

"I don't care 'bout myself," he declared. "I'm only thinkin' of you. You've never skimped in your life before, an' I hate to see you doin' it now."

"I guess it won't hurt me. It's my own doin', too—remember that; if I don't like it there's no one but myself to thank. As it is, though," she added quickly, "I never was so happy in all my days—never! Nobody knows what Delight has come to mean to me; an' as for the Captains—if they were my own people I couldn't be fonder of 'em! Now, Zenas Henry, you stop worrying an' being discouraged 'bout the money. Let me get you a raisin! You know, I think there's nothing like eating a raisin when you've got the blues.

While you're busy getting the seeds unstuck you can't put your mind anywhere 'cept on that raisin, an' by the time you've chewed it up an' swallered it you forget you ever had a trouble in the world."

Abbie applied this remedy unfailingly to every form of depression.

It was seldom she permitted low spirits to hover over the white cottage.

If secret worries haunted her, if the future presented financial difficulties both new and disquieting, with the cheeriness on which her family had come to rely, she went steadily forward. She was the pilot of the ship. Had she so much as hinted that she could not clearly see the channel ahead all her crew would have lost courage. Just how troubled a sea it was through which she was sailing no one but herself knew. Of what use to alarm the others? Zenas Henry was no more of a financier than a baby, and were not the Three Captains already doing all within their power? Every day they fished faithfully, and they had also established among the cottagers a lively traffic in lobsters and clams. In addition to this source of revenue Zenas Henry's garden promised supplies for the household and a profit from the market as well.

It was not the problem of daily living that was disturbing Abbie. She could cope with that. But looming ahead were taxes, Zenas Henry's insurance, extensive repairs on the house which could not longer be delayed. Then Dave had come begging a loan, and was he not a Howland and her only brother? She had gladly given him every cent she could spare; afterward, however, she found herself with a scantier margin than she had calculated. But, fortunately, she was of an optimistic temperament. If there was a good haul of scallops during the winter, she argued, and if the cranberry crop was not nipped by an early frost, with a little straining the family purse could be stretched to meet every need. She was pinning her faith to the cranberry harvest. There had been seasons when the dredgers had not brought up a scallop from the bay, but the cranberries had never failed.

In the meantime, with the self-effacement of motherhood, Abbie put all her heart into the sacrifice she was making. And, after all, was it really sacrifice? When Delight's soft hair brushed her cheek was not a joy born far outweighing any discomfort poverty could bring in its train?

The girl was already so welded into the home

that there seemed never to have been a period when she was not a part of it. Time had gradually cleared the perplexities growing out of her advent to the white cottage. Not only was she clothed and housed, but even the more vexing task of her mental training was now in other hands. One morning Professor Farwell, who had drifted in to see Zenas Henry, witnessed a combat in the arithmetical arena that filled his mind with wonder. He took council with his wife and later quite casually suggested that Delight come to the Knoll each day and have her lessons with his son Donald's tutor. Here, indeed, was a happy answer to the Brewsters' education puzzle! Under such well-directed teaching the girl made surprising progress and soon her feet were set in an intellectual pathway which, though less picturesque, perhaps, was far more certain of its ultimate goal.

Yet despite her eagerness for learning Delight was by nature a child of the open sky. When free to please herself she loved to roam amid the sun-patched mazes of the pine wood, or to wander along the shore where "the broad and level sands stretched far away." Sometimes she gardened with Zenas Henry; sometimes, at low tide, splashed fearlessly into the weirs and, disturbing

the peace of crabs, squid, and dogfish, helped the Three Captains bring in the catch.

Thus the weeks passed.

The promises of spring were redeemed in the richer growth of midsummer. Marshes became wind-tossed seas of emerald, billowing hither and thither with the wanton caprice of every breeze. Inland from the bay, along the reedy margins of the ponds, pink sabbatia mingled with unfurling water-lilies, and a host of blue dragon-flies darted over the rippling waters.

With the coming of the summer's heat Abbie began to show the strain of the battle she had secretly been making. Her cheek was less rounded; her brilliant color faded into a mere hint of rose; there was a nervous tremor in her laughter. To those about her this change went on so gradually as to pass undetected; it was the villagers who noted and commented upon it.

"They say Abbie Brewster's the mainspring of that whole establishment on the hill, an' blest if she ain't beginnin' to look like it!" said Martha Crocker. "She's gettin' drawn out thin as wire! You needn't tell me she ain't havin' hard sleddin' to get on. It costs somethin' to live now-a-days. If you haven't the money to feed six, an' buy

clothes for 'em, you've no business to invite 'em to live with you. I always said it was foolishness for the Brewsters to take in those Three Captains an' that child. Mark my words—they'll go to smash some day!"

Promptly the town took up the gossip.

"The Brewsters are all goin' to pieces!" they whispered among themselves. "They much better have left those three lazy men where they found 'em, an' packed that child off to Virginia where the mate of the *Michleen* wanted to take her. Goodness knows folks enough have advised Abbie, but she just cocked her head up an' sort of pleasantly told 'em it was none of their business. It is dretful sad to think of her an' Zenas Henry comin' to want, but what can they expect—fillin' their house up with every Tom, Dick, an' Harry that's needin' a bed!"

Storekeepers caught up the rumor and soon the ill news traveled so openly from one end of Wilton to the other that at length Silas Nickerson felt it his Christian duty to acquaint Captain Phineas Taylor with the tale.

"I reckon you've heard what folks are sayin' 'bout the Brewsters," he began one day when he had succeeded in cornering the unsuspecting Cap-

tain by himself. "Mebbe there ain't a mite of truth in the story—you never can tell. I, for one, certainly hope there ain't. Is it a fact that they've run aground for funds an' are livin' on what Abbie has in the bank?"

"What!"

"I say, is it true? Everybody says so."

"True! Of course it ain't true!" blustered Captain Phineas stoutly. "Whoever started that yarn was a liar. Don't I live there, an' wouldn't I know if anything was wrong? Do I look as if I was starvin'?"

"No, you don't; but Abbie Brewster ain't the woman to let you starve. She'd give you her last penny. Are you sure you ain't takin' that penny?"

Captain Phineas caught his breath.

Was he sure?

All the way home he repeated the question.

For the first time in his experience he was face to face with a large and real aspect of life—an aspect opening into manifold vistas of disquietude. The poverty of his previous career had been cast off with carefree unconcern and, if that were all, he could again toss want aside in the same indifferent fashion. But here was a calamity involving others, persons he had learned to care for deeply

fast losing heart when one afternoon as he sat alone on the porch a stranger drove into the yard.

He was a large, florid, smiling man, and when he jumped out of his wagon Captain Phineas noticed that his clothing was of city stamp, and that he wore a heavy gold watch-chain with many charms dangling from it.

Tying his horse, the newcomer strolled up the walk.

"Am I speaking to Mr. Brewster?" he asked, mounting the steps.

"No, sir. I ain't Mr. Brewster. The Brewsters have driven over to Sawyer's Falls for chicken-feed," explained Captain Phineas promptly. "I live here, though, an' mebbe I'll fill the bill just as well. What can I do for you?"

"Well, you can't do much for me," replied the man with a broadening smile, as he dropped into a chair and began to fan himself with his hat. "My name is Stone. I come from up Brockton way and I'm selling land."

"This ain't the place for you, then," answered the Captain. "We ain't buyin' no land—or anything else, for that matter. Goodness knows, I wish we could!"

"Down in your luck, are you?"

"Never you mind. We just ain't buyin' land —that's certain."

"Now, you let me tell you something," Stone observed after a deliberate pause during which he mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. "If you're hard up, I'm the very man you are looking for. I can put you on the track of a bargain—something wonderful—something that'll bring you in a lot of money. Over toward Bayville I've got a piece of rich, moist land that I want to give to somebody who'll make good use of it. By giving away I mean that I'm asking next door to nothing for it. You see I own land everywhere. I'm so overstocked with it that I want to get rid of it. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. I've taken a fancy to you! Somehow you make me think of a brother I had who died years ago. I'd like nothing better than to do you a good turn. I'll give you that whole five miles of land for—don't you ever tell a soul or they'd think I was crazy—I'll give it to you for seventy-five dollars!"

"That's kind of you, my friend," was Captain Phineas's unenthusiastic reply, "but as things happen you might just as well say seventy-five thousand. I ain't got a cent in the world. I live here with Abbie an' Zenas Henry, and, though I turn

a penny or two by fishin', I always hand over to Abbie whatever I get. It's little enough, I'm afraid. I used to think it was a fortune when I first began to earn it, but I guess now it never went far toward payin' the bills."

"You seem kinder blue," Stone ventured.

"Well, wouldn't you be blue if you had been helpin' to eat up somebody else's money an' then had no way of payin' it back when they were needin' it?"

"But you've got a way right here! What a fool you are—excuse my saying so—to sit down and worry when you might be making a fortune for your friends. Why, you could raise cranberries enough on the land I'm offering you to make them rich—yes, rich—and yourself besides! Think of the chance coming to you at the very moment you want it. It seems like a miracle! You ought not to hesitate a second. If the offer was made to me I'd snap it up before you could say Jack Robinson, I'd be so afraid the owner would change his mind."

Captain Phineas regarded him earnestly.

"Do you think you could raise a good crop of cranberries on the land?" he queried.

"*Think!* Man alive! When I get to imagin-

ing the barrels and barrelfuls of stuff you could get off that land I can't help knowing that I'm a blooming idiot not to keep it myself instead of handing it over to you."

"You wouldn't be handing it over to me," declared the Captain quickly. "It ain't for myself I want it. What I'd do would be to give it to Zenas Henry. He's always had great luck raisin' cranberries an' I calc'late he'd be tickled nearly to death to own such a big bog, for the place he has now ain't bigger'n a ten-cent piece. I'd put the land in his name, an' give it to him for a surprise."

"You'd surprise him all right!" The eye of the agent twinkled. "It would be the biggest surprise he ever got." Evidently the thought amused him for he grinned broadly. "Come, now, why don't you do the business right up before he comes back and catches you at it? You give me seventy-five dollars——"

"But I haven't seventy-five dollars! I haven't a cent. I can't buy any land—what on earth am I thinkin' of!"

Leaning forward, the stranger struck the Captain's knee with a resounding slap.

"I declare, if you ain't more and more like my

brother every minute. Why, I want you to have that land so that actually I'd make you a present of it if I hadn't a wife and six little ones at home. I want to see you with that land the worst way. Now you do as I tell you and I'll fix the whole thing up. You step over to some neighbor you know well and borrow fifty dollars. Don't tell him what you want it for or he might come right back with you and offer me more money, and like as not I'd feel I ought to take it. No, you get your fifty and give your note to pay the money some other time. You'll have plenty of cash later on. Then, in addition to this fifty dollars, you can throw in some little thing you have round here to eke out the bargain. I'll let it go that way and say no more about it."

As if hypnotized Captain Phineas rose and went out, returning after an interval with fifty dollars which he had borrowed from Silas Nickerson, and which Silas well knew Abbie Brewster would pay if Captain Phineas didn't. The mystery of its purpose he had skillfully concealed. The philanthropic Mr. Stone folded the greenbacks quickly inside a long, much-worn billbook.

"Now, what shall we toss in besides?" he asked as he wandered about the room inspecting the fur-

nishings. "Let me see! Do you know, I believe I'd take that melodeon and call it square."

"But Zenas Henry'd never part with that melodeon!" objected Captain Phineas hastily.

"Not in the face of five miles of land! Bless your soul, he'd be only too ready to. Don't you think if he saw his way to get rich he'd hustle that melodeon out the door faster than you could wink? Why, before another season he'll be buying dozens of melodeons—that is, if he wants 'em."

The simple Captain beamed.

"I s'pose he will!" he assented. "I just can't seem to get used to the idea of his havin' money to sling round."

Stone patted him on the shoulder.

"You find it hard to picture him a millionaire, eh?" he laughed. "Oh, you'll drop into it in time. Don't worry. Now I'll sign this paper for you and the land is yours!" He hurriedly scrawled a signature across the long blue document. "There you are! Your name goes on this line. Good! Now, if you'll help me lift the melodeon out into my wagon I'll be off so you can have your fun to yourself."

With another slap on the Captain's back, with many a sly wink and much loud laughter, the

melodeon was at last in the wagon, and Captain Phineas stood alone on the steps turning in his fingers the magic slip of blue paper.

The worries of Abbie and Zenas Henry had been put to flight.

He—Phineas Taylor—*had made them rich!*

CHAPTER XIV

AN AWAKENING

IT was dusk when Abbie and Zenas Henry came into sight.

Captain Phineas, who for the past half hour had been pacing the strip of walk between the borders of tiger-lilies, saw the wagon the moment it rounded the crest of the hill. During an afternoon of waiting and of enforced meditation a reaction had assailed the Captain's courage. Not that he really regretted what he had done—no, indeed! But, now that the convincing personality of Stone was no longer at his elbow, sober second thoughts surged questioningly through his conscience. Moreover, the empty corner where the melodeon had stood was not reassuring. There was a well-defined block of color in the faded wallpaper that marked its outline, while on the carpet another

clear-cut rectangle of scarlet served as a vivid reminder that some object long native to the spot was missing.

After all, would Zenas Henry be pleased?

The Captain's convictions, so strong at first, now wavered.

Yet as he turned and re-turned the slip of blue paper in his fingers he assured himself that conditions had not changed. Was it not that the exuberance of the stranger's mood left the silence behind him flat and depressing? Captain Phineas tried to think so. Nevertheless, what would he not have given for the certainty he had felt earlier in the day. Upon reflection, it seemed a monstrous thing that he should have parted with Zenas Henry's melodeon; and as for the money he had been swirled into borrowing—how was he ever to repay it?

A very wretched nooning he spent, shut up by himself in the fastnesses of the white cottage.

This lapse of spirit, however, like the dead level of the tide, soon began to turn in a more hopeful direction. Why should he take this despairing view of the affair? There had not been a hint of anything but kindliness in the agent's attitude. Why not believe in the good luck prom-

ised him? Thus it transpired that as the wagon wheels cut their way through the sandy soil their every turn heightened the wave of optimism that was sweeping over the Captain; and when at last the carriage rolled up the drive his primal enthusiasm was once again at the flood.

Abbie and Zenas Henry alighted at the steps silently. They were white with dust, and, although Zenas Henry greeted Captain Phineas pleasantly enough, his voice had the downward inflection of the disheartened. It proved that the day at Sawyer's Falls had been crowded with annoyance. Samuel had cast a shoe on the way over and in consequence there had been a delay of an hour at the blacksmith's. Then the particular mixture of grain needed for the chickens could not be found; and, while Zenas Henry could get a number fifteen collar, he could not get a sixteen. These misfortunes might, perhaps, have been endured had not the buckles for the harness been too small.

Even a cruder psychologist than Captain Phineas would at once have perceived that the present was no time to drag forward a surprise. Accordingly he listened silently to Zenas Henry's outpourings on the stupidity of horses in general, and

shopkeepers in particular, and continued to cram deeper into his pocket the slip of blue paper. A draught of water at the pump, however; a dash of coolness over hands and face; a quiet half-hour in the twilight breeze; and a steaming beef stew, gradually shifted horse and storekeeper into normal perspective. What did it really matter, Zenas Henry argued as he took up his pipe and strolled out on the porch? Silas Nickerson was going to the Falls to-morrow. He could get the grain and the collars. There wasn't any actual rush about the buckles for the harness. By the time Delight and the other two Captains came back from the weirs carrying an unusually large catch all was peace, and peace it might have remained had not a sudden cry from Abbie put tranquillity to flight.

"Zenas Henry!" she called excitedly, "come here this minute! Somebody's got into the house while we've been away. The melodeon's gone!"

Followed by the entire family, Zenas Henry rushed within doors.

There stood Abbie, a lighted candle in hand, surveying with astonishment the scarlet blot of carpet in the empty corner.

"The melodeon!" repeated Zenas Henry vacantly. "The melodeon gone! It can't be gone.

Who would have taken it? I'd rather thieves had stolen a thousand dollars than that melodeon!"

"We'll catch 'em! They must have boarded the place in open daylight," Captain Jonas broke in. "Regular pirates!"

"How on earth could they do it?" questioned Captain Benjamin. "To drive right up to a man's house an' cart off——"

"It warn't no pirates," interrupted Captain Phineas in calm notes. "I swapped the melodeon."

"You what!" Zenas Henry shouted. "You swapped my melodeon—*my* melodeon! What business had you swapping things of mine? Who'd you swap it to? Where is he? I'll hunt him up an' bring it back here if I have to swing for it. Who's got it, Phineas? Who's got it?"

With a quick glance into Abbie's anxious face, Captain Phineas brought out the blue paper. He told his story amid a breathless hush, trying to throw into the narrative all the glamour with which Stone had beguiled him. But, try as he would, shorn of that subtle persuasiveness, the tale fell to the ground. Beneath the gray light of the actual its every vestige of romance withered until only shreds of improbability remained.

Even before his friends had pronounced their verdict Captain Phineas knew he had been duped.

"So this is what you swapped my melodeon for!" thundered Zenas Henry. "A parcel of land over in Bayville that you ain't never clapped eyes on! How do you know there's any land there? An' if there is, how certain are you that it's good for anything? What do I want, anyhow, of a cranberry bog twenty miles away? Do you think I have the arms of a well-sweep to live in Wilton an' work a bog miles an' miles off? That scoundrel has just got my melodeon an' left nothin' to show for it! Anyway, it ain't likely you could get five miles of land for the best melodeon livin' —not land that's worth anything!"

"I gave him fifty dollars besides the melodeon," confessed Captain Phineas, driven to bay.

"Oh, Phineas!"

It was Abbie's hand on his sleeve. Had she stabbed him she could not have cut more deeply than by the hopelessness of those two words. The truth came upon him that instead of lightening her burden, as he had intended, he had but added to its weight.

"Where did you get the money, Phineas?" she asked gently.

"Silas Nickerson let me have it. I gave him my note."

"An' how are you calculatin' to raise the fifty dollars to pay him?" demanded Zenas Henry, derisively.

The Captain turned away.

He made no effort to defend himself.

"Phineas shall have the money to meet that note—my money if he needs it," Abbie said, stepping forward and confronting her husband. "'Tain't right for you to be so hard on him, Zenas Henry. The Bayville land may be there, just as he says. What business have you to blame him until you find out?"

The force of her plea was not without its effect.

Captain Benjamin shuffled uneasily from one foot to the other.

"There may be land," he repeated.

"The feller may be honest; it may be 'xactly as he says—who knows?" put in Captain Jonas.

"There's only one way to find out," was Zenas Henry's cutting retort, "an' that is *go to Bayville!* Before to-morrow night I'll make sure which of us is the fool—Phineas or I! But I'll tell you just one thing, Phineas Taylor," he added, wheeling on the Captain impressively, "you needn't ever

CHAPTER XV

ABBIE TAKES THE HELM

THE next morning, while frost still silvered the ground, Abbie Brewster stood alone in the midst of her ruined garden looking out over the fresh, glistening world. Roofs and fences, encrusted with brilliants, caught the first gold of sunrise and sparkled gayly. Beyond the gleaming landscape stretched a sweep of sea untrammeled by human presence save where the distant sails of the fishing fleet dotted its blueness with flecks of white. The air vibrated with the exhilarating breath of early fall. It was the woman alone who was out of harmony with the joyous note of the day.

Despairingly she gazed down on the blanched marshes whose beauty had so suddenly taken on the sterner aspect of tragedy. The cranberry har-

vest on which she had reared her hopes lay wrecked at her feet. It was unbelievable! Even after Zenas Henry and the Three Captains assured her over and over that the crop was gone she had been unable to make the disaster a reality. Dully she repeated their words. Then slowly her optimism shriveled. There was no parleying with the grim facts confronting her. Not only was her own escape from financial peril blocked by the calamity, but also Dave's chance of restoring to her the borrowed capital which she now so much needed. One narrow way of deliverance alone remained—Captain Phineas's land! If, indeed, there was land, and if it proved to be of any value, she might yet be able to raise on it enough money to meet the emergencies crowding her so cruelly.

In the faint dawn she had watched the Captain and Zenas Henry set out for Bayville and, as she lingered among her drooping flowers and faced the merciless future, her imagination kept pace with every stage of their journey. What would they find? Alas, she dared not frame an answer! Nor did the chill, silent earth, so slowly awakening into warmth, bring to her the hope or sympathy she craved. How useless to expect it! Impatiently she shook herself free of reverie and went within

doors. Action was the only possible refuge from her anxiety. She brushed up the rooms; started the breakfast; and, having time still on her hands, scrubbed the copper tea-kettle until she could see her face in it. Afterward she awoke Delight; they breakfasted together and washed the dishes. Later when the child had set out for a holiday at the Farwells, Abbie herself closed the blinds, and went to spend the day with Dave's wife. Zenas Henry could not return before late afternoon and in the meantime anything was better than to remain alone all day beneath her own roof.

The cheer she was in search of, however, she failed to find at her old home. After the first greetings were over, and she was busy stitching the seams of a slip for the baby whose coming Mary was daily awaiting, the conversation turned upon the loss of Dave's cranberry crop. In vain did Abbie try to console and encourage. It was like dragging a sled over bare ground. Mary was certain no one in the world was so unfortunate as Dave. To have his cranberries freeze this year of all others—just as the new baby was coming, and there would be so many extra expenses! And now, of course, they could not pay Abbie the money they

owed her; she did not see how they ever could pay it.

Upon Abbie's assurance that she could get on somehow without the money, Mary's plaint took a different theme. Nobody knew how miserable she felt! She knew she should never live through the illness before her—either she or the baby would die. Both of them would never survive. If she was "taken" Abbie must promise to bring up the child and make a home for Dave. She supposed he would marry again—men generally did.

Although, before the day was out, Abbie was rewarded by seeing these clouds of despair give way to a more hopeful mood, it required all her vitality to bring about the transition. Instead of receiving comfort it was she who gave it.

"Some folks are made to be histed along!" she exclaimed whimsically, as toward sunset she climbed the hill to the white cottage. "It's all as you set out! If you once begin to hist, you need never expect to be histed. Folks'll forget you ever need histing. I s'pose likely it's fair enough, only now and then I wish——"

Abbie's wish was never expressed for, as she put her hand on the doorknob, a crash rent the house, reverberating through its empty rooms, and shak-

ing the windows until they clattered in their frames. Then all was still.

Terrified, she stepped across the threshold.

In the midst of the sitting-room before a heap of plaster fragments that had once been the smiling *Clytie*, stood Zenas Henry. His fists were clinched, his cheeks a burning scarlet. With intense gaze he regarded the shattered image at his feet. Then he glanced up and saw his wife.

"I couldn't help it!" he burst out. "I've held in all the way home—never laid a hand on Phineas or the horse. But I kept gettin' madder an' madder till by an' by I just couldn't reef in my temper another minute. Quick's I set foot in this house I had to have somethin', an' that plaster woman was the first thing I clapped eyes on. Besides, *she looked so smug!*"

Abbie's intuition leaped the gaps in the story.

"So there wasn't any land at Bayville," she said quietly, with a forlorn little attempt to be brave.

"Oh, yes, there was! There was land—plenty of it," contradicted Zenas Henry. "That warn't the trouble. An' the deed was all right, too. Stone made certain that land should belong to Captain Phineas. He didn't leave any loopholes."

"Then what is the matter?"

"Matter? Well, I wish you could see that land! It would be worth the trip over there just to see it. It's a good five miles long an' most a mile wide, an' it stretches from the edge of the town out toward the ocean. Most all of it is swamp—old stumps an' skunk cabbages, feet-deep in black mud an' water. The end runnin' out to the sea is a salt marsh that's under water at high tide. It's a bog right 'nough—only 'tain't a cranberry bog," concluded Zenas Henry grimly.

As he reviewed the incident his wrath once more boiled up, prompting him to step forward and grind a bit of the wrecked *Clytie* beneath his heel.

"I wish I had Stone here!" he muttered, as the plaster crunched under his foot.

Resolutely Abbie placed herself before him.

"Zenas Henry," she commanded, "you stop crumbling that stuff all into my carpet—stop it right away! The idea of your letting yourself go this way—a great man like you! Come right away from that plaster mess, and sit down on the sofa!"

Steadied by his wife's unusually sharp tone Zenas Henry paused, motionless.

A second later he shambled over to the sofa.

"Now sit down and tell me all about it."

Gently she drew him down beside her and patted the back of his big hand kindly.

"I'm sorry I smashed that image," he said. "I ain't done a thing like that for so long that I'd begun to think I was all cured of it. But I'm afraid that when I'm good an' mad I'm bad as ever."

"Indeed you're not! Don't think about it any more now, dear. Tell me what happened."

"Well," began Zenas Henry, "we went plumb to the Town Hall when we landed in Bayville. We wanted first to find out if the deed was any good. Course if it wasn't there was no use lookin' up the land. The town clerk looked the paper all over right-side-up an' up-side-down an' then he grinned. Afterward he made a record of the deed an' charged us two dollars for doin' it."

Abbie sighed.

"When I asked him if there was any such land an' where it was, he grinned again. Yes, the land was there—he knew very well where it was. He seemed to be enjoyin' some mighty good joke all to himself. Finally he told us about it. Stone is pretty cute, but it appears that a few years ago some feller who owned this marsh was cuter. Somehow he managed to swap it off on Stone

without Stone seein' first what he was gettin'. Since then Stone's been payin' taxes on it, an' tryin' to work it off on somebody else. While he was drivin' round huntin' for some unlucky fool to light on he met Phineas, an' set about fastenin' it on him—fastenin' it on good an' tight, too! From now on Phineas'll have the taxes instead of Stone—that's 'bout what the thing amounts to."

Leaning forward Zenas Henry viciously kicked a fragment of plaster that lay conveniently near.

"Zenas Henry," cried Abbie, "let that stuff be! Ain't it bad enough to have smashed that poor, innocent woman all to pieces without kicking her round the floor afterward? Will the taxes be much?"

"Not a heap. Still, added to the fifty dollars Captain Phineas owes Silas, an' our expenses to Bayville, an' the price for recordin' the deed, it will add up quite a tidy little sum. The loss of the cranberries, 'specially just now, is a mighty bad happenin'. Somehow, though, you always seem to manage, an' I reckon you can this time, can't you?"

With child-like confidence Zenas Henry looked into his wife's face.

"Yes, I think I can," was the response.

"That's what I told Phineas. He was so upset he wouldn't come in from the barn. I guess I'll just step out an' tell him you ain't turned every stone yet."

Abbie nodded.

The next morning, quite alone, she set out in the dusty wagon for Sawyer's Falls. She was going to turn the last stone. This stone consisted in placing a mortgage on the white cottage which Zenas Henry had made over to her on the day of her marriage.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SILVER LINING

TWO years sped rapidly over the heads of the Brewster household.

In the meantime to the old Howland mansion had come a gold-haired baby who not only made glad the hearts of Dave and Mary but added a fresh interest to the lives of the family on the hill. Delight, never tired of caring for this wee cousin, had now become the idol of the white cottage. She and Zenas Henry were boon companions. A strange bond it was that linked so closely the great gruff man and the merry, prattling child. To be sure the girl loved Abbie and the Three Captains—loved them with all the ardor of her warm young nature; but her feeling for them in no degree approached her devotion to Zenas Henry himself. There was but one Zenas Henry in all the world; nobody else could take his place, no other

person do as well. Her last kiss at night, her first in the morning was for him. If doubt assailed her, if an enigma crossed her way, her unfailing solution was: *"I'll ask Zenas Henry!"*

For Delight had frankly adopted the quaint name. It had been Zenas Henry's own wish that none of them should dictate the names by which they should be known to her.

"We've no business foistin' on the little critter four uncles an' an aunt," he said. "Folks are altogether too free about claimin' relationship with children, in my opinion. Mebbe when she grows up she won't relish havin' such a batch of ready-made relatives hitched to her. Let her pick out her own names for us."

The girl had found the choice a simple matter. Abbie and the Three Captains had bristled with pride at being dubbed aunt and uncles. But on Zenas Henry no name had been bestowed. It seemed profane to drag her idol into such a mundane connection. As soon bridle the steeds of Aurora or boast kinship with great Jupiter himself! Accordingly, Zenas Henry was simply Zenas Henry.

A far more controlled Zenas Henry, too, he became as time rolled on. Not that his identity was

lost, or his personality stifled. No! Still was he famed as of yore for his weather-predictions and his temper. Nor did he evolve into so perfect a product of industry that he no longer needed to be prodded to plow up the potato patch. Very human was Zenas Henry, and human he remained. Yet for all that there was a difference. Gradually his rough nature softened and deepened; his hot-blooded temperament answered more obediently the rein of his will. Sometimes, it is true, he lapsed into a desire to discipline his offending possessions, but these impulses he resolutely curbed. No one appreciated more fully than Abbie that, although these triumphs were to some extent due to her help, the real spur to his victory lay in the subtle influence of the child. The thought of her mingled in everything Zenas Henry did. Unconsciously she dominated and controlled through the very ignorance of her power.

Although this taming of Zenas Henry was evident to all who lived beneath the same roof, no one but Abbie knew the fierceness of the warfare it represented. The Three Captains were content to accept the resulting peace without analyzing it.

For both peace and prosperity did reign within the Brewster home.

Two good harvests of cranberries had been gathered and shipped to Boston, bringing a considerable increase to the depleted treasury, and enabling Dave to repay the loan Abbie had made him. Then followed winters of unparalleled "hauls" from the scallop beds. So phenomenal was the luck that dealers established themselves at Wilton and offered cash for every bushel of shellfish brought up by the dredges. These merchants also took upon themselves all responsibility of shipment, thereby relieving the fishermen of risk and guaranteeing a sure market for their wares.

Money became plentiful in the town.

Yet with all this success Abbie Brewster had been unable to pay the debt threatening the white cottage. Much of the sum demanded she had managed to scrape together, eking it out of their daily living; but they had run so far behind that it took almost every cent to meet present expenses and it was beyond her power to lay by enough to complete the sum necessary. What rendered it so difficult was the entire ignorance of her family with regard to the transaction. They now saw no reason for pinching and hoarding. Since what they earned came easily they spent it with equal ease. All she contrived to turn in toward clearing the

mortgage she had been forced to smuggle, from time to time, from the blue china sugar-bowl where the common funds were kept.

Not for an instant did she regret having jeopardized the roof that sheltered them. It had been the only course open to her, and had tided over a crisis she could not otherwise have met; but now that the time for reckoning slowly and certainly approached its coming caused her constant worry. How was she to discharge the obligation hanging over them? She could not believe but there was some escape. There must be. The sum was not large. It was, on the contrary, absurdly small when contrasted against having a dwelling and being without one. Small as it was, however, she faced the certainty that she could not lay it aside before the date when it must be forthcoming.

What was she to do?

Many a plan did she work out during the sleepless hours of the night; but out of them all only one seemed feasible—to ask the Farwells to loan the money. They never would miss it. Nay, they would give it gladly. It was just because she feared that they would insist upon making her demand a gift and not a loan that she hesitated. Already she had accepted many favors at their

hands. Were they not educating Delight? And only the winter before had they not recognized Zenas Henry's beloved melodeon in a Boston antique shop and forthwith purchased and shipped it to Wilton? She still remembered how tears had come into Zenas Henry's eyes when it was uncrated and placed once again in its old corner. To ask more on the heel of all this kindness was ungrateful.

Yet with the sinking of every sun nearer drew the day of settlement. Like Banquo's ghost at the feast, it was a menacing spirit visible to her alone.

Perhaps it was the frown of this ominous presence that made her unwontedly silent as she sat darning socks that April evening. Zenas Henry and Captain Jonas, who were untangling a snarl of fish-lines in the circle of light cast by the hanging lamp, failed to detect her preoccupation; nor did Delight, busy with lessons, see that she lacked her customary smile. But from time to time Captain Benjamin stole troubled glances at her from over the top of his paper. Abbie was quite unconscious of his scrutiny. She never felt she needed to be on her guard against Captain Benjamin. He had an easy-going fashion of taking everything for

granted. It was the keen discernment of Captain Phineas which she dreaded.

But to-night Captain Phineas had gone to the store. He had been there, too, an unreasonable time. She wondered, as she filled the yawning holes in the pyramid of blue woolen socks, why he was gone so long. Now-a-days she was always uneasy. What if a rumor of the mortgage should creep abroad and reach her unsuspecting family? She wouldn't have them know for the world!

Therefore when Captain Phineas suddenly entered the room flourishing above his head a long gray envelope, her heart gave a throb of apprehension. It was a legal document, there was no mistaking that. Of course it was for her. None of the others had legal business. Suppose she had made an error in the date the payment of the mortgage fell due! Perhaps the bank was serving notice for them to leave the premises!

The walls of the room began to close in about her.

To have the news come so suddenly, and before them all! They would insist upon knowing the contents of the letter—she would be forced to expose the whole truth. And then the Three Captains, whom she had struggled so hard to

shield, would see that they had been a constant burden; and Zenas Henry would find out that he had been living on her money. All the bitter truth would come out. The price she had paid to protect those she loved had been wasted! It was cruel—cruel!

Upon the entrance of Captain Phineas, Zenas Henry and Captain Jonas paused to look up, and Captain Benjamin darted an inquiring glance over the edge of his spectacles. The sight of Captain Phineas with any letter at all would have been sufficiently startling; but to behold him with a document so impressive in his possession was astounding!

"Eh?" queried Zenas Henry, a cod-line suspended in his fingers. "What you got there, Phineas? It ain't a *letter!*"

"Looks mightily like it—sure's I'm born!" Captain Jonas ejaculated.

"It is a letter. I can see the stamp!" declared Captain Benjamin. "What's happened to you, Phineas? Who's sent you a thing like that?"

"I—I—don't—know!" Captain Phineas gasped faintly. "I can't for the life of me imagine."

He looked frightened.

Bringing the letter to the table he held it under the strong light.

"Captain Phineas Taylor!" he read in a shaky voice. "'Tain't got in the wrong net. It's mine. No doubt about that."

As the others jostled each other to examine the address Abbie drew a breath of relief.

Thank Heaven it was not for her!

"Who do you s'pose it's from?" speculated Captain Jonas.

"Mebbe they're goin' up on the taxes of the Bayville bog," Captain Benjamin suggested.

"That ain't likely," was Zenas Henry's laconic retort.

"Why don't you open it, Phineas?" demanded Captain Jonas.

"I s'pose I might but I kinder hate to—it looks so sorter shipshape with the stamp, an' name, an' all."

He turned it nervously in his fingers.

Reaching forward Zenas Henry took the letter.

He studied the envelope carefully.

"'Tain't from Bayville at all!" he cried at last, holding the postmark close to his glasses. *"It's from New York!"*

"New York?"

There was a chorus of dismay.

"I don't know anybody in New York!" Captain Phineas replied quickly. "That settles it—it ain't for me after all."

A weight visibly slipped from his shoulders. He took the missive from Zenas Henry and with spirit slapped it face-down on the table.

"Man alive! Of course it's for you. Ain't your name on it?" shouted Zenas Henry. "Is there any law against somebody in New York knowin' you, even if you don't know them?"

"Humph! That ain't probable! If I had made out that postmark 'fore I fetched the thing home I'd 'a' left it with Silas. He kinder doubted it bein' for me anyway, an' wanted me to wait till the other folks got their mail so'st we could overhaul it together."

"You much better open it here, Phineas."

For the first time Abbie spoke.

Her voice seemed to clear the mists of indecision.

The Captain straightened himself. Without another word he took out his pocketknife and ripped open the long envelope. A typewritten sheet with an imposing business heading rustled into his hand.

Captain Phineas spread the sheet on the table and, smoothing it carefully, scrutinized its contents, the others peering meanwhile over his shoulders.

There was a tense silence.

Then Zenas Henry cried: "Bless my soul!"

So brief was the message that it stood baldly forth from the crisp gray paper.

Captain Phineas's land lay directly in the pathway of the Cape Cod Canal, and the firm in charge of the giant project now offered him a price far exceeding all he had paid for it!

Could it be true?

Laboriously the Captain read the letter aloud, that there might be no mistake about his good fortune. No, there was the offer in black and white; and there, also, was the stamped envelope that it might be answered immediately.

Captain Phineas took up the envelope.

Letter-writing was no casual event at the white cottage; it was a ceremonial.

Zenas Henry favored asking Mr. Perkins, the minister, to draft the reply; this suggestion, however, was instantly vetoed by Abbie in whose breast the memory of the "sluggard sermon" still rankled. For his own part Captain Phineas

would have preferred to turn the matter over to Silas Nickerson and Lyman Bearse and perhaps he might have done so had not Captain Benjamin twitted him on not being able to manage his affairs himself. After no small amount of discussion it was at last decided to focus the united intellect of the household upon an answer to the terse document which, by this time—through much handling—had lost much of its primal elegance.

The framing of the reply consumed many hours and much ink, and occasioned the borrowing of two dictionaries from the neighbors. It was a literary masterpiece. Madame Sevigny could have done no better. It opened with a page of profoundest gratitude to the New York firm for buying the land at all, and it concluded with a cordial invitation to the entire company to drop in at Zenas Henry's for a hot chowder if they ever came to Wilton. The seventh copy of this remarkable effusion was sealed, directed, and stamped. But not to Silas Nickerson could they entrust a commission so portentous. No! The Three Captains and Zenas Henry themselves drove to Sawyer's Falls and with their own eyes saw the letter stowed within the leather mail-bag, and subsequently tossed aboard the train.

Then they came home to wait. Life seemed suspended during the days that followed.

In the meantime, by some mysterious method, it became noised abroad that Captain Phineas Taylor had come into a fortune! Some said it had been left to him; others that he had made it through a remarkable investment. But the source of his wealth was not half as interesting to the townspeople as was the universal agreement that if it had not been for the Reverend Archibald Perkins' sermon on the "sluggard" the Captain would never have been rich at all. Ever since that memorable Sabbath Captain Phineas Taylor had been a changed man. Everybody had noticed it! What a pity the other two Captains should not have made equally good use of the advice given them!

Poor Captain Phineas! Little did he dream he was being held up as an example of one who had been snatched from the burning!

Had he realized it perhaps he would not have cared. He was in far too ecstatic a frame of mind to weigh such trifles.

He moved in a dream.

The New York lawyers came, signed the papers, and were gone.

"Oh, Phineas, I can't take your money," she faltered gently, as she touched the coarse brown hand resting on her chair. "It is yours—more money than you ever had before in all your life. Indeed I couldn't think of takin' it. You must keep an' enjoy it."

"I'm goin' to enjoy it!" was the instant response. "There ain't any way on earth that I'll enjoy it so much as givin' it to you. What do I want it for? I ain't got a soul in the world—no folks, no home—nothin'! All the woman or child I've got to care 'bout is in this house. Mebbe if things had gone a bit straighter life would 'a' been different, for when I was a lad there was a girl down on the Maine coast I used to think a sight of. While I was gone to sea, though, she got married. It was all right, I guess. I warn't good enough for her anyway. From then on I kinder got out of the way of ever expectin' to have a home or folks of my own. Likely I never would have had any if you hadn't took us in here. But now it's different! . . . You'll keep the money, won't you?" he pleaded. "Why, the biggest reason I was so tickled to get it was so'st I could give it to you an' Delight."

He paused.

"You'll think I'm sorter silly," he went on, fingering the back of Abbie's chair thoughtfully, "but somehow I've got to almost believin' that child's mine—that she really belongs to me. Workin' for her, an' doin' things for her as I have has made her seem somethin' like my own. I never was much on takin' a steady job—none of us Captains was! But when every cod you haul in means shoes an' hair-ribbons for her, it makes a different chore of fishin'. 'Tain't the fishin' I like —it's the hair-ribbons."

His voice quavered and he stopped.

Abbie turned away her head.

"The girl's kinder filled in a gap for all of us, I reckon," he continued more firmly. "Now you take the money. Let's say no more about it. Put part of it away for her an' use the rest yourself. Will you?"

Not trusting herself to speak Abbie nodded speechlessly.

As her hand closed over the gift a prayer of thankfulness rose from her heart. In the moment of her greatest need aid had come. She was free!

It was long before Abbie Brewster gave to her household an account of how she had used her

portion of Captain Phineas' money. But there came a day when calamity, like a sunken reef, was far in their wake and their ship was safely making its way amid smoother waters; then did she tell her story, toning its crudeness into beauty by the pathos of the telling.

At the conclusion no one spoke.

Then at last Zenas Henry raised his head and whimsically regarded his wife:

"'Pears this house ain't ours after all!" he observed slowly.

Captain Phineas laughed.

"What do we care whose it is, Zenas Henry, so long's we've got a roof clear an' free to shelter Abbie an' the child?"

Ah, here was the bond that bound these four men; that dignified their simple lives, and transformed the white cottage into a paradise. Not, perhaps, that Utopian paradise which years before Zenas Henry and the Three Captains would have pictured to themselves—a realm of idleness where day after day they should sit and do nothing for ever and ever; but a paradise of self-effacement along whose upward path, rich in the joy of service, a little child should lead them.

THE END